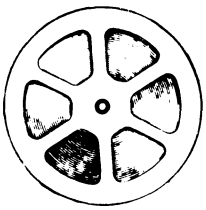
GREENHORNS:

Foreign Filmmakers Interpret America

By Norman Kagan.



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Editor's Notebook

REVIEWERS WANTED

Once more we are beginning to assemble reviews and annotations for our yearly film-book round-up, which will appear in the Summer 1983 issue. Readers who would like to contribute to our coverage are invited to volunteer by mail or phone (415-642-6333). Because of the large number of titles to be dealt with, reviews must be kept compact. We also welcome nominations for books that deserve inclusion or special attention, since some always seem to escape our net.

PERIODICALS

Grand Illusions, published by the Emerson College Film Society (100 Beacon St., Boston MA 02116) is a lively student magazine concentrating on interviews—John Sayles, George Roy Hill, John Waters and Ray Harryhausen grace the latest issue.

Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities is published at JU Box 26, Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, FL 32211 ($9.00 for three issues, $14 for institutions). The journal has a distinguished editorial board, and especially welcomes interdisciplinary manuscripts. It also carries interviews and book reviews.

CONTRIBUTORS

PAT AUFDERHEIDE, an editor at *American Film,* also writes regularly for *In These Times.* GIDEON BACHMANN, our Rome Editor, is also a film-maker. MICHAEL DEMPSEY, our Los Angeles Editor, has recently been engaged in script-writing. RAYMOND DURGNAT is working on a book about Michael Powell; he teaches at the Royal College of Art, London. DANIEL GREENBERG teaches film history and cinematography at Oakland Community College in Michigan, and is also a film-maker. JOHN T. HARTZOG teaches literature and film at the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. PETER HOGUE is completing a book on Howard Hawks; he teaches at Chico State University in California. KAREN JAEHNE has just been appointed editor of the McGill encyclopedia volumes on foreign films. TERRENCE RAFFERTY is a freelance writer who lives in New York City. ROBERT STAM teaches at NYU and is the co-author, with Randal Johnson, of *Brazilian Cinema* (Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1982); he is fluent in Portuguese and recently spent five months in Brazil.

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GIDEON BACHMANN

Man of Heart: Andrzej Wajda

Man has rights as long as he knows how to preserve them. —Delacroix in prison

The artist and intellectual most closely associated in the world's mind with modern Poland is the film director Andrzej Wajda (born 1926), whose films have since 1954 chronicled the growth of free ideas in his native land—not always with help from its authorities, not always with success, and not always with joy. But *Generation, Kanal, Ashes and Diamonds, The Promised Land, Without Anaesthesia* and *The Conductor,* among his 28 films, have become world classics, and his last two, *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron,* showing the rise of Solidarity and, in a way, the beginning of its demise, have made Wajda's name a household word everywhere.

At the moment of writing, Wajda has come away from Poland to make his first film since the imposition of martial law in December of 1981. He is in Paris shooting *The Danton Affair,* the story of the eight days of the trial and execution of Danton during the French Revolution. Though based on a play he had previously directed in a theater in Warsaw, the topic cannot fail but ring contemporary echoes. The press has reported, however, that in order to be allowed out of Poland to make this film, Wajda had to promise to give no interviews on the Polish situation. In actual fact, he has preferred to keep a low profile.

© 1982 by Gideon Bachmann. All photos by Gideon Bachmann.

Exceptionally, he agreed to speak at some length to Gideon Bachmann, American film critic and film maker, who first went to see him in Warsaw in 1961, and has maintained friendly contacts with him ever since. The following are excerpts from their conversations, held in Paris on May 3rd, 4th and 5th of this year.

From the script:

"We cannot win this trial. It's part of a political process. And politics follows its own mechanics, which has nothing to do with justice." —Philippaux, speaking to Desmoulins, in the cell at The Luxembourg, two days before the guillotine.

"Haven't you understood that we had to allow ourselves to be imprisoned? In order to open the eyes of the people! To show them what the Comités are capable of! Now they have seen, and understood."
—Danton, before the transfer to The Conciergerie.

BACHMANN: *Why shoot* Danton, *the story of the bureaucratization of a revolution, in 1982?*

WAJDA: This is not a new idea of mine. But in all the years that I have been thinking of realizing it, I was aware that it couldn't be a Polish film. Until now, to make it in Poland would have been an idea that engendered suspicion. In any case, an internationally produced film has more of a chance to be seen worldwide.

What does Danton *mean to you, today?*

It is a strong, violent, dramatic story, based on forceful characters who helped change his-

tory. And ever since I saw Depardieu for the first time, I knew that one day I had to find a role for him. *The Danton Affair* was a play by the Polish playwright Stanisława Przybyszewska which I directed in Warsaw six years ago, and it seemed to me the time had come to make the film now, and with Depardieu.

You came to France with more than 20 actors and technicians . . .

I found I couldn't do without my Polish actors, with whom I had worked for many years and who constitute my "group." What I have done is try to integrate them while at the same time allowing them to retain their uniqueness: all the "Robespierristes" in the film are Polish, including Wojciech Pszoniak, who plays Robespierre himself, and all the "Dantonistes" are French actors, led by Depardieu. Each group speaks its own language, although of course the film will be dubbed for release in uniform languages.

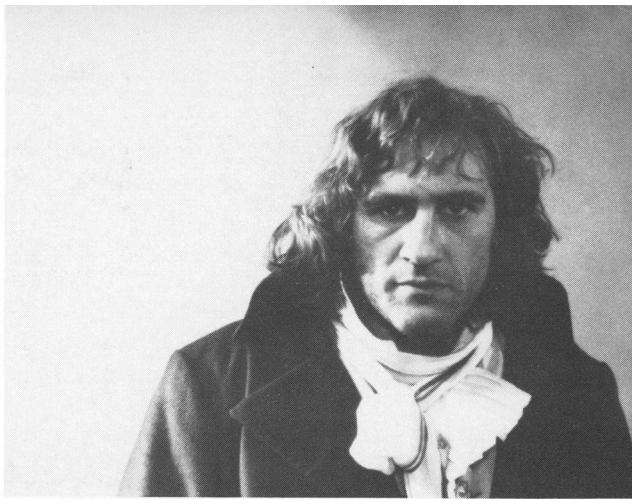
Does this not make for difficulties in shooting?

Actually the contrary occurs. Usually, when actors on a film set speak different languages, they begin, after a while, to act slower and slower, as if comprehension lagged. You can tell that they need to reflect more, that they don't have the necessary immediate reactions. This transmits itself to the viewer: he can no longer feel the full energy of the actor, to share his full pleasure.

In our case, however, the division isn't purely mechanical: the different languages have a differing ideological content. The Poles have in them a violence; they understand the politics of the story, of this French Revolution which by historical necessity advanced towards the use of terror as an instrument. They understand this necessity, this fate of revolutions symbolized by what happened at the trial of Danton. This, in fact, is the real subject of my film: that while the revolution more or less knowingly advances towards terror, the leaders are aware that terror is a mortal danger.

Why do you feel that it is especially Poles, and especially those of today, who can feel this so strongly?

For us, today, the French Revolution is the source from which spring all inquietudes, all man's attempts to change his fate, all his refusals to accept that which is and his strife to want more. We Poles, in this sense, today



Gerard Depardieu as Danton

feel like children of the French Revolution.

Does this apply less to the group of French actors?

No, but it is the collision that counts. The French actors around Danton have their own world, and what I am interested in is the conflict of concepts. The French Revolution, after all, isn't really finished. Its spirit lives, but with different intensity in different places and times. I find it only natural that men should revolt and that they should continue to believe that the course of history can be changed by their actions.

Is violence always a necessary evil in a time of change?

Perhaps not, but it is one of the major subjects in *Danton*. Yet I do not feel that the question of violence can be a determining factor in itself. What counts is what is determined by its use, and the limits set for it through consciousness, if any. In any political process there is the need for the elimination of the adversary, but where does this normally lead? Just before my film begins (and I am only dealing with the last eight days of Danton) Robespierre has eliminated the "left wing," Hébert and the "Hébertistes," and now he finds he must eliminate the "right wing" in order to be able to pursue his "centrist" line. It would be wrong to accept that Robespierre is on the left, since he only moves left in relation to Danton, in the Dantonist spirit. No, he is the typical representative of the center, and as such he commits the fundamental error: he risks everything, realizes everything, but too late realizes that in doing so he oversteps limits to which he cannot return.

You are not saying that "within limits" violence is essential?

Certainly not. But for the understanding of the period with which we are dealing, and especially the Danton affair, the definition of the concept of violence is essential. Let's say, first, that if we count the victims of the Revolution in thousands, those of the Reaction must be counted in tens of thousands. But is this a moral criterion? Is the question of "how many" are killed of importance? Or is it a question of psychology?

This is an element which I want to bring out in the film: the discussion between Robespierre and Danton, between two differing forms of reasoning for revolution, must be not only a political discussion but a psychological one. Without the psychology, nothing can be understood. As you cannot make a political film by thinking only of political elements.

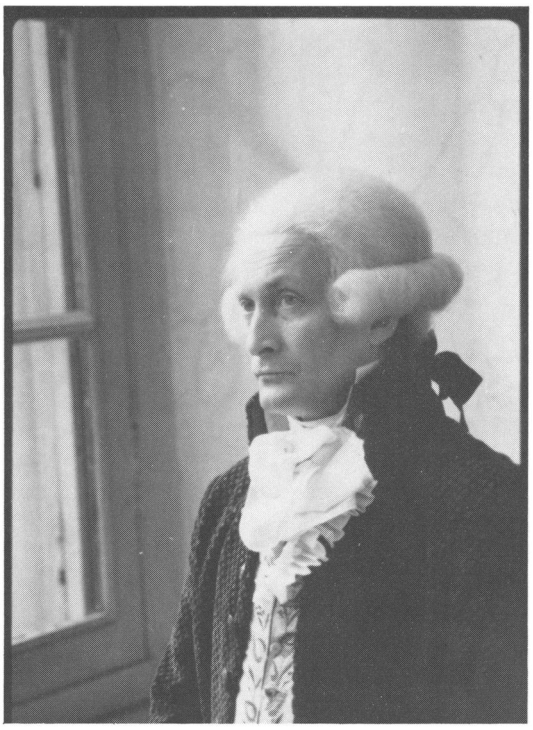
It is useless to try and understand historical personages without trying to understand their feelings. Only in this way can we approach the answer to the question: how is it that these two men, these two leaders of the Revolution, who understood better than anyone the aims of the Revolution, could not find conciliation, could find no common language in order to save the Revolution from this extreme danger, from the "solution" called violence? You have to ask yourself: who were these men?

In this sense, the question becomes universal: what passes between, or among, men, so that they can no longer trust each other? Why does one—in this case Robespierre—always, and with all force, need to destroy his adversary? Why cannot the Revolution succeed as long as Danton is alive? Isn't it possible that conciliation is only one other form of "solution"?

Is this a suggestion made in the film?

Not in this way. But if you attentively watch these two characters played by Depardieu and Pszoniak, their appearance, their behavior, their meeting on screen, the electric spark that passes between them, you receive a psychological image of considerable complexity that goes beyond linear explanations such as you suggest. In any case, there is no such thing as an explanation, and even then it's a historian's job to try.

I do not want to be caught classifying, relating and explaining history, but wish to



Wojciech Pzoniak as Robespierre

make an emotional statement, showing that the French Revolution, too, passed through a stage where every "solution" could damage it. I think, by the way, that every revolution reaches this stage sooner or later, the stage where one feels one is up against a wall, fighting historical necessities. I am particularly anxious to show, in my film, that revolutions do get to this stage, that emotions contribute as much as political reasoning to that which eventually becomes history.

Do you find the last eight days in Danton's life especially expressive of this inevitable impasse?

This was the first political trial in history, and like all trials it presents a natural dramaturgy. The natural drama concentrates the content; there is a clarity. I personally feel close to it because I think I am a person who identifies strongly with men seeking greater justice, justice not subject to political pressure. I am not neutral in my films, I defend the weak, in the tradition, one might say, of Polish Romantic art of the 19th century. This trial was the archetype of all political trials and it simply means a great deal to me.

Then you want to express more about revolutions than the fact that they reach an impasse?

Look, the French Revolution is the beginning of everything. She is the mother of all revolutionary ideas. For example: everybody has studied it; that's important. In so short a time, with such incredible concentration, a condensation of hopes was created that expressed and expresses all the dreams of mankind, all the situations that continue to repeat themselves for hundreds of years. It is a phenomenal source of inspiration and information.

With all the negative phenomena it engendered?

Yes. The French Revolution found itself confronted by a dilemma: to fight in the name of the majority meant to subdue a minority. That was Robespierre's hope and impasse: he hoped that this Revolution, by maintaining and perpetuating itself, would cause the masses to become autonomous, conscious and politically mature. That it would help the masses, as it were, to jump a stage, the stage of the bourgeois class. But the French Revolution in the end represents the victory of the bourgeoisie, which managed to get itself established later thanks to the Revolution.

Sometimes, studying the French Revolution, one gets the impression that there was a chance there for it to go further, but this further stage in reality was impossible since no workers' class existed, which, in orthodox Marxist interpretation, is essential for revolution. This class, or *a* class, with the necessary consciousness, was lacking, and thus the Revolution could go no further.

But the French Revolution, like all popular movements, created a situation of no return, and that is what's important. That early freshness of spirit, that virginity of events. Those are the things I care for and those are the things I want to show.

DANIEL A. GREENBERG

The Reference Shelf Shuffle

Reference works provide basic introductions to every area of human inquiry. Moreover, their information structures the conceptual framework whereby understanding and appreciation develop. Unfortunately, the reference shelf presently available for the study of motion pictures is in sad disarray. For the most part, it offers widespread and persistent error, confusion, and contradiction. The time has come for a sober reassessment: an analysis of numerous failures, the recognition of a few achievements, and discussion of a program for better performance in the future.

The pervasive bad effects of slipshod encyclopedia articles and single-volume film reference works have spread throughout the film world because normal standards of scholarly evidence have been and still are poorly observed. Inadequate critical review of these materials has allowed their acceptance. Our present reference sources began to evolve in the 1920's, when standards of historical research and reporting on popular entertainment were even more lax than today. Manufactured history proliferated, often distributed for commercial ends. What Gordon Hendricks later exposed as "the Edison motion picture myth" led the way, highlighted by admirers' extravagant claims, and Edison's own immodest ones as well. Innumerable books and articles enshrined Edison's position as sole inventor of the motion picture. But as the twenties wore on, encyclopedias and general reference works began to define, describe, and evaluate the motion picture more extensively. Those early treatments, and their descendants, even now populate home libraries and public reference shelves—their errors and contradictions still spreading misunderstandings, particularly about the history of the motion picture art.

For twentieth-century America, the prime encyclopedia has been *Britannica,* which first published an article entitled "Motion Pictures History" in 1926. In its 1910 and 1922 editions, the subject was dealt with under the heading "Cinematograph," an early term derived from the Lumière brothers' name for

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their camera and projection system. Ironically, those first articles were far more accurate than what followed. Other encyclopedias, *Collier's* and *International,* for example, also printed entries on moving pictures in the twenties. Whether they, or others, had done so earlier is difficult to determine since many early editions are no longer available. In any event, it is clear that the 1926 *Britannica* set the lamentable tone and standards for film reference works—standards that persist to this day.

Terry Ramsaye wrote this first *Britannica* article the same year (1926) that his history, *A Million and One Nights,* was published. That work was endorsed by Thomas Edison as ". . . the first endeavor to set down the whole and true story of the motion picture." In fact, as later film scholars laboriously discovered, Ramsaye's history was often distorted and sometimes manufactured—as well as marred by racial bias. Yet he remained, at least according to the *New York Times,* ". . . generally acknowledged as the dean of film historians . . ." at his death in 1954. His *Britannica* article, despite its increasingly widely known flaws, *was printed and reprinted with relatively little change from 1926 through 1964!*

A relatively insignificant historical point can serve as an easily traced example of the way in which, lacking scholarly standards, error is generated, spread, and enshrined. According to Ramsaye, in 1824 Peter Roget (of *Thesaurus* fame) delivered a paper entitled, "Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects." As a matter of fact, Roget did deliver a paper on that subject, the theoretical basis of the motion picture. He did *not* use that title, nor the phrase, "persistence of vision"; nor was he the first to deal with this phenomenon, nor did he indicate the phenomenon's implication for moving pictures. Yet, apparently because of Ramsaye, Roget today is widely credited with such accomplishments. (Ironically, in 1948 Ramsaye wrote a laudatory foreword to Quigley's *Magic Shadows,* a volume which notes the title Roget actually used.)

Encyclopedia article production must be an interesting occupation. It does have one clear advantage: previous contributions to an encyclopedia are fair game for the rewriter. Ramsaye originated the game and someone merchandised his articles for at least 23 years after his death. For 39 years the *Britannica* printed Ramsaye's title for the Roget essay. During many of those years, *The Encyclopedia Americana* printed a very similar article, "The History of Motion Pictures," also authored by Ramsaye, although it did not title Roget's essay. In 1965, when Arthur Knight "wrote" *Britannica's* new "Motion Pictures History," he continued the Roget title and used much of Ramsaye's work verbatim. Presumably the copyright was held by *Britannica,* and such material was legally recycled. The erroneous Roget title was finally removed from *Britannica's* 15th edition in 1974 by Gerald Mast who authored that edition's "History of Motion Pictures." Knight's 1982 *Collier's* entry still uses the "Persistence of Vision" title.

Whether Ramsaye invented the false title, or simply popularized someone else's invention, is not clear. But popularize it he did, most notably through the good offices of Arthur Knight, whose numerous encyclopedia articles and approximately 700,000 copies of *The Liveliest Art* (1959, 1979) continue to assert this item of manufactured history. Knight is, since 1960, Professor of Cinema and for a time was Director, History/Criticism/Aesthetics Program, University of Southern California's Division of Cinema and Television.

Ramsaye and Knight also present with great certitude the dramatic, oft-quoted story that motion pictures were first demonstrated in the Edison Labs on October 6, 1889. As Hendricks discovered, that was the Sunday Edison returned from Europe, ill with indigestion sufficiently severe to warrant notice in the newspapers; this makes it doubtful that he rushed to the studio to see what his assistant Dickson had wrought. Considerable evidence, as well as conflicting reports by the principals and, of course, later historians, raise other and more serious doubts. For example, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine Edison, noted for prolific and sometimes premature caveats and patent applications, waiting almost two years after this dramatic première before applying for a patent.

At best, the October of '89 Legend is suspect. What was the first motion picture shown? And when? Those questions probably will never be answered with certainty, particularly not in such broad, inclusive form. A variety of titles, dates, locations, and projection for-

mats vie for the honor. The wealth of contradictory evidence would seem to demand a certain scholarly caution in works intended for the reference shelf. The five columns below recount the events of October 6, 1889, as reported by William Dickson, Terry Ramsaye, Arthur Knight, and Gerald Mast.

In 1894, in two major articles written with his sister Antonia, Dickson ignored the issue. The following year Dickson generated the October of '89 Legend (see first column below) in *History of the Kinetograph Kinetoscope and Kinetophonograph* (New York: Albert Bunn, 1895). By December 1933, writing for the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* Dickson recalled many additional details, including the screen which Edison later denied, under oath, had ever existed. (Edison also asserted elsewhere, in writing, that the screen did exist that day and denied that he had ever denied it.) Gordon Hendricks lists "Fifty Representative Dickson Errors" in *The Edison Motion Picture Myth,* among them:

> (1) On April 3, 1914, Dickson claimed only the *week* after Edison's return from Paris, later he claimed the *day*. Later he claimed October 6, and still later he "proved" this latest date by dating the microphotograph/ Edison photo four years earlier than, according to copyright records, it was actually taken.
>
> (2) On April 3, 1914, he claimed a synchronous projection in "early 1889. Can anyone beat that?" Later he claimed October 6, 1889, as the first such.

The entries from Ramsaye below (column three) are taken, respectively, from *A Million and One Nights* (1964 ed.), his *Britannica* article which varied only slightly from 1926 to 1964, and from his *Encyclopedia Americana* articles, at least those that appeared 1973–77. Column four: Arthur Knight's *The Liveliest Art* (paper, 1959, 1979). Gerald Mast's 1981 *Britannica* statement completes the table.

DICKSON—1895	DICKSON—1933	RAMSAYE—1926	KNIGHT—1957 & 1979	MAST—1981
The crowning point of realism was attained on the occasion of Mr. Edison's return from the Paris Exposition of 1889, when Mr. Dickson himself stepped out on the screen, raised his hat and smiled, while uttering the words of greeting, "Good morning, Mr. Edison, glad to see you back. I hope you are satisfied with the kineto-phonograph."	Mr. Edison's return to his laboratory took place October 6, 1889. . . . [147 words describing the setting] . . . I was seen to advance and address Mr. Edison from the small 4-foot screen; small, because of the restricted size of the room. I raised my hat, smiled, and said, "Good morning, Mr. Edison, glad to see you back. Hope you like the kinetophone. To show the synchronization I will lift my hand and count up to ten." I then raised and lowered my hands as I counted to ten. There was no hitch, and a pretty steady picture. If the pictures were steady in the taking, why not in the reproduction on the screen?	Edison peep show kinetoscope demonstrated by William Kennedy Laurie Dickson at West Orange, October 6, 1889. The demonstration of the Edison kinetoscope at West Orange, N. J., on Oct. 6, 1889, with a strip of Eastman film made the motion picture an accomplished fact. In a few weeks his peep-show Kinetoscope, the ancestor of all motion picture mechanisms, was complete and demonstrated in his laboratory. The date was Oct. 6, 1889.	Indeed, this ingenious man [Dickson] even managed to link up the pictures with the phonograph, demonstrating the Kinetoscope to his employer on October 6, 1889, with a brief film in which Dickson both appeared and spoke. What was in all probability the first actual presentation of a motion-picture film also marked the debut of the talkies!	In 1889 Dickson shot the first film in the U. S. on celluloid, *Fred Ott's Sneeze,* a medium close-up of one of the workers in the Edison factory sneezing for and at the camera. Dickson also invented the Kinetoscope, a little peepshow viewer that displayed *Fred Ott's Sneeze* and other filmed items to the eye of a single spectator.

Obviously these seven accounts cannot all be true, since they contradict each other. Neither of the two most recent works takes account of scholarly investigations, particularly the painstaking work of Hendricks, into what actually happened at West Orange. Yet they, their var-

iants, and other fanciful versions of the world première of motion pictures are widely regarded as authoritative.

Contradiction and confusion are not confined to encyclopedia articles. Disregard for scholarly standards is apparent all across the motion picture reference shelf where every category has its share of errors and inaccuracies, often generated by the same few individuals. Ramsaye, Knight, and Mast have not only written the majority of motion picture entries in American encyclopedias, but have done extensive work in other formats.

Significant faults appear, for example, when the three editions of Mast's *Short History of the Movies* (1971, 1976, 1981) are compared with one another, with his *Britannica* article, "History of Motion Pictures" (1974 to date), and with his "History of Film," in the *Academic American Encyclopedia* (1980 to date). In the last, *Fred Ott's Sneeze* is omitted, though in nine *Britannica* editions and the first two editions of Mast's *Short History* it was the first film (1889) shot on celluloid in the United States. The 1981 *Short History* moves Mr. Ott's nasal explosion on celluloid to 1891, or perhaps 1890.

Mast shifts Edison's role in motion picture history from edition to edition. The October of '89 Legend is presented as gospel in all three *Short History* editions—while being mysteriously ignored in the nine *Britannica* articles. In the *Academic American,* Mast has Dickson first filming in 1891.

To arrive at the above chaos, only 15 small samples of Gerald Mast's work, published in the 12 years, 1971-1982, have been analyzed. But Mast is better than some and perhaps no worse than many. A cold look at the entire film reference shelf is clearly overdue because even readily verifiable historical facts are inaccurately reported and erroneously presented.

"History," as it is presented on the reference shelf, may be clouded for partisan legal, economic, or critical purposes, even when the facts are readily available. The invention, patenting, and introduction of the Kinetoscope is a good example. *Specifications and Drawings of Patents issued from the United States Patent Office for March, 1893* reports that Thomas Edison was granted Patent #493,426, on March 14, 1893, for an "Apparatus for Exhibiting Photographs of Moving Objects." Edison had filed for that patent on August 24, 1891. As is well documented, the first commercial presentation of the Kinetoscope was on April 14, 1894, in the Holland Brothers' Kinetoscope Parlor at 1155 Broadway, New York City, while the first public Kinetoscope exhibition was May 9, 1893 at the Brooklyn Institute.

However, the contemporary reference shelf information on the invention, patenting, and commercialization of the Kinetoscope is a morass of confusion. The verb "patented" is used frequently, but erroneously. One *applies* or *files* for a patent which the government *grants* or *issues.* The completed process is "patenting." This is not an idle point since often many years pass from application to issue and inventors hesitate to market unprotected devices. The various stages of this process, as discussed in recent and currently available reference works, have generated a few accurate partial accounts (the *Oxford Companion to Film* correctly describes the development process; Knight's 1972 *Britannica* article gets the patent application and granting dates right; Spottiswoode's *Focal Encyclopedia of Film and Television Techniques* gets the development process right) but most accounts are fragmentary and confused, and many are downright erroneous. *No single source whatever gets the entire story straight.*

Clearly, we are in deep trouble here. It should be apparent that students, scholars, and interested lay readers need to generate a widespread outcry for new standards.

How should proper film history be written? Accurate historiography has six basic requirements: (1) Verified original materials. In early motion picture history, for example, these often include court transcripts from the numerous legal proceedings as Edison sought to assert his patent rights during film's first decades. Because of film's technology, engineering journals are another major original source. "Original materials" also include diaries, letters, business records, trade and general newspapers, magazines—in fact, *all* documents generated during the period considered. (2) Cautious and openly acknowledged use of secondary sources: commentaries on, and analyses of, original materials. (3) Use of corollary materials: the social history of the period

in question. (4) The logic and patience to authenticate facts and materials. When properly assessed, contradictions of fact and language corroborate lack of trustworthiness in original materials and provide clues for new avenues of research. (5) Clear, accurate records kept during research and verification procedures to permit full and reliable footnoting. (6) Written history (the report offered by the scholar) which is clear and accurate and *as free from bias as possible.* The historian needs to restrain his or her enthusiasm for conclusions and only draw inferences warranted by validated facts.

An excellent example of valid historical research is Gordon Hendricks's trilogy: *The Edison Motion Picture Myth* (1961), *Beginnings of the Biograph* (1964), and *The Kinetoscope* (1966)—now available in one volume from Arno Press as *Origins of the American Film* (1972). Hendricks's careful review of legal proceedings, Edison archives, contemporary newspapers, and most of the secondary and corollary literature is a model of responsible historiography, a process which attempts to extract an accurate and valid record. Accurate and valid history, presented in proper perspective, is obligatory for a professional field; but for lay readers too it is valuable for what it teaches about the world, human nature, and appropriate modes of behavior.

Finally, in the film field it is regrettably still necessary to insist that reliance on tertiary sources is *not* a permissible methodology, nor can usefully reliable materials afford the telltale proviso, ". . . as quoted in . . ." Reference works based on unverified sources, many times removed, however, are still being purveyed. Such scandalously tertiary materials proliferate because of economic demands on the publishing industry, academic pressures to publish, excessive reliance on celebrity, and the emphasis on speed and quantity rather than quality. But if film history is to become a legitimate scholarly enterprise it must eschew such pressures in favor of valid standards.

Inaccurate information, once considered an unacceptable breach of the scholarly spirit, is now quite commonplace: "The error quotient is about average . . ." wrote David Badder in his *Sight and Sound* review of the *Oxford Companion to Film.* His cynical acceptance was matched by Stanley Kauffmann, also reviewing the *Oxford Companion,* in the *New Republic:* ". . . it's taken for granted that such a work's publication is a progressive matter, beginning as well as possible and then improving through subsequent printings."

Of course no information system is totally error-free. We must recognize also that in recent decades accumulated knowledge has reached such gigantic proportions that most reference works are now committee products. In the study of film only Katz and Sadoul come to mind as individual authors of worthwhile, comprehensive reference works. Perhaps the field is now too complex and too extensive for any one individual to master, at least anyone adhering to high standards of painstaking research and verification.

No reference work, particularly the widely circulated, popular, handy, one-volume variety, can be altogether complete. The selection process for any compendium mandates exclusion as well. No publisher could afford to detail the entire history of the motion picture in one work, even if retail price were no concern. Nor is it possible to remain current as film continues to develop. No one reference work will please everyone. Yet, sales statistics and library holdings indicate that the current crop is pleasing a lot of the people a lot of the time. In addition to encyclopedias, nearly every major library reference collection offers a wide choice, often including all of the following, in addition to some more esoteric sources: Liz-Anne Bawden's *The Oxford Companion to Film* (1976); Tim Cawkwell and John M. Smith's *The World Encyclopedia of the Film* (1972); Leslie Halliwell's numerous *Guides* and *Companions* (1965–1982); Ephraim Katz's *The Film Encyclopedia* (1979); Leonard Maltin's *TV Movies* (1980, 1982); Roger Manvell's *The International Encyclopedia of Film* (1972); *The New York Times Directory of the Film* (1971); David Ragan's *Who's Who in Hollywood, 1900–1976* (1977); Georges Sadoul's *Dictionary of Films* and *Dictionary of Film Makers* (both 1972) Steven Scheuer's *Movies on TV* (1981); Raymond Spottiswoode's *The Focal Encyclopedia of Film and Television Techniques* (1969); and David Thomson's *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (1976, 1981). Note the dates: they coincide with the emergence of the cinema in the United States as a respectable art form, an academic discipline,

and a major element in the home entertainment market. Against such a background these reference books have dispensed facts and figures often as ephemeral as the world of film illusion itself—and have colored everyone's experience of the motion picture.

Many one-volume reference works do not require extensive analysis and discussion; they stand or fall on obvious merits or demerits. However, *The Oxford Companion to Film,* Halliwell's *Companions,* and Thomson's *Biographical Dictionary* require detailed examination. In their different ways they are symptomatic of contemporary production and merchandising of reference materials.

First, however, a word about the "TV-Movie" paperbacks, a particularly onerous subcategory of film "reference" works deserving quick and complete condemnation. Although popular, and better regarded than they ought to be, their value is limited to providing a vague notion of what to watch on the tube while relaxing after a difficult day. Maltin's *TV Movies,* for example, allegedly lists in its 884 pages "everything you want to know and more" about 15,000 movies now being shown on TV plus over 1500 made-for-TV movies. It is a simplistic work that packages the motion picture as just another product for television consumption. The motion picture has provided beautiful, enduring images; it is a shame to debase them as products for television's maw, huckstered by Maltin's brief, throwaway assessments. The same evaluation applies to Steven H. Scheuer's *Movies on TV,* formerly published as *TV Key Movie Guide,* and *TV Movie Almanac and Ratings,* whose cover proclaims its 1982–83 edition a "Million-Copy Best-seller." In spite of their prevalence and convenience, Maltin and Scheuer share numerous fatal flaws with Halliwell's *Film Guides,* most notably inaccuracy and confusion. All three disagree widely on dates, film running times, and how many of the available stars, or fractions thereof, productions deserve.

Unfortunately, even the more ambitious contemporary reference volumes are marred by factual error, and do great disservice to the study of motion pictures. *The Oxford Companions* have long had a well-deserved reputation for accuracy, clarity, and breadth of information on theater, literature, poetry, and languages. Sadly, the motion picture has not been well-served by its Oxford companion. Yet hardly a reference collection can be found without one. (In Spring 1981, of 21 libraries in southeastern Michigan, 17 held copies of the *OCF.* Presumably this degree of prevalence is not confined to southeastern Michigan.)

Had any knowledgeable cinema person reviewed this book before acquisition, it might not be so widely featured in reference collections. Actually, it does not require a trained film historian to note the extensive inaccuracies that plague *The Oxford Companion to Film.* The only skill required is reading and remembering from page to page.

Consider the various *OCF* entries which discuss the Motion Picture Patents Company, an important organization which developed early in American film history. It was an outgrowth of the Edison Manufacturing Company's attempt to control the motion picture industry. The salient facts which should appear in an encyclopedic reference are summarized below. This "entry" was prepared following the historiographic principles listed above. The prime source was Ralph Cassady, Jr., "Monopoly in Motion Picture Production and Distribution: 1908–1915," *Southern California Law Review,* Summer, 1959, pages 325–390; now partially reprinted in Gorham Kindem, ed., *The American Movie Industry* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982). This secondary source was based on Dr. Cassady's review of court transcripts of United States v. Motion Picture Patents Co., and on his examination of numerous original and secondary sources. His information was verified by reference to other original materials, by structural and linguistic analysis, and by reference to corollary materials.

> The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) was incorporated September 9, 1908, and activated by patent assignments and the issuance of licenses on December 18, 1908. The Trust, as it became known, began operations in January of 1909 with the execution of several agreements with Eastman Kodak, Armat, and the film exchanges. The Motion Picture Patents Company was organized by the Edison Manufacturing Company and the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company who pooled 16 key motion picture camera and projector patents held by them, the Vitagraph Company of America, and the Armat Moving Picture Company.
>
> Edison and Biograph held the MPPC stock

while ten firms were licensed to utilize the patents and engage in the motion picture business. In addition to the above three (Armat was not licensed), the remaining licensees were: Essanay, Kalem (whose "K" represented George Kleine, separately licensed as the Kleine Optical Company, importer of Gaumont and Urban Eclipse Films), Lubin, Méliès' Star Film, Pathé Frères, and the Selig Polyscope Company. The records indicate other company names. From time to time licenses were issued for specific film ventures (sound, color, a special production), but the eleven companies noted were at the core of the MPPC operation.

The MPPC entered into contractual agreements in five areas of the motion picture business: raw film supply, motion picture production, projector manufacture, exhibition, and distribution. On April 18, 1910, the ten MPPC licensees formed the General Film Company as a distribution arm. It began operations June 6, 1910, and consolidated film exchanges under its control. By patent assignments, licensing procedures, litigation, film exchange ownership, and strong-arm tactics, the Trust sought to dominate the motion picture business.

The movies' great economic potential, however, encouraged the Independents. They organized their own film exchanges, import and production companies, and successfully introduced and merchandised the feature film. Two key legal proceedings ended the MPPC: the US Government anti-trust action filed in 1912, resulting in a 1915 decision finding the MPPC in restraint of trade, and a 1917 Supreme Court finding against the Trust in its suit against Universal. However, the Trust's influence had begun to diminish by mid-1912.

Now, that may be more detailed than necessary; but it is an accurate summary in approximately 350 words, well within the scope of encyclopedic references. But what treatment does the Patents Company get in the *OCF*?

On p. 72, an entry on Biograph says the MPPC was set up in 1908 to "corner" rights to existing patents (a colorful but incorrect term). On p. 219, an entry on Edison says the Edison patents "on most motion picture camera and projection devices" were the basis of MPPC's trust efforts (in fact, the projector patents were not Edison's). On p. 715, an entry on United States of America says Edison formed the MPPC in 1909, and that it included Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, Lubin, Essanay, Selig, Méliès, and Kalem, together with Kleine. On p. 623 an entry on Selig says he was one of the founders in 1909 (the date was 1908 and he was a licensee). On p. 481, an entry on the MPPC calls it a trust formed in January 1909, with seven major manufacturers, the distributor Kleine, and the French companies Pathé and Méliès (that's ten), and goes on to refer to "the nine companies"; this entry omits Armat altogether, and neither Armat nor Kleine have entries at all. On p. 430, the Lubin Company is described as one of the seven members of the MPPC. And on p. 336 an entry on Hollywood writes of the MPPC being set up in 1909 and of independents finding it convenient to operate there because it was distant from New York and close to the Mexican border. The Trust is also mentioned under various other headings, often confusing and at cross purposes.

Thus, leaving aside questions of misemphasis and misinterpretation, the basic facts according to the *OCF* are simple: The Motion Picture Patents Company was a seven, nine, or ten member trust founded in 1908 or 1909.

This extended sample of internal contradictions and external error is only the beginning. Clouded impressions also emerge when tracing the demise of the MPPC and its remnants as Selig, Vitagraph, Lubin, and Essanay formed VLSE. And one will be disappointed searching for consistent answers to such questions as when Dickson left Edison's employ, how many reels in Sarah Bernhardt's famous *Queen Elizabeth,* when the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America was founded, when MacGowan's *Behind the Screen* was published, or when 16mm Kodachrome was introduced.

One of the *OCF*'s major defects is its impossible goal. Its Preface states that objective: ". . . to answer any query which may occur to the amateur of film in the course of reading or film-going. . . ." To answer *any* query is an obsessive, if not impossible, goal. Perhaps a more modest attitude, an attempt to provide basic information in an accurate manner, would have been a better objective for the prestigious Oxford University Press.

Who are the experts that recommend volumes such as this? The critical establishment, that relatively small group of experts who sit in judgment in every field and pass those judgments along to their readers. Whether organized or not, such groups are readily identified. They furnish the critical plaudits that adorn dust jackets and advertisements. Often their work reflects personal tastes and private

prejudices, rather than sound analysis and evaluation.

A survey of eight standard periodical guides* reveals 27 critiques of the *OCF* which appeared between February 15, 1976, and Summer 1978. The 26 that were available for analysis comprise an extended example of critical malfunction. They range from a brief paragraph to detailed analyses in excess of 3,000 words. They appeared in relatively obscure library reference journals (*Reference Services Review, Choice, American Reference Books Annual,* and *Library Journal*), in film journals (*Sight and Sound, Film Comment, American Film,* and *Film Quarterly*), and in newspapers and general circulation magazines (*New Republic, Times Literary Supplement,* and the *New York Review of Books*). I have analyzed these critiques in six ways: (1) the judgmental or value-laden words utilized; (2) the number of *OCF* errors noted; (3) scope, indicated by errors of omission considered significant; (4) extent of *OCF* coverage; (5) critical reaction to *OCF*'s illustrations; and (6) a comparison of ideas, logic, and diction.

First, look at the judgmental words in the 26 articles. These essays contain 471 words which may be characterized as value-laden, either in a commendatory or perjorative way. Of these, 293 reflect a negative judgment while the remaining 178 are positive. Yet the distribution of these judgmental words is so uneven that the overall impression is positive. Certainly there are sufficient phrases to embellish any dust jacket.

A second insight into critical confusion develops from analysis of the errors numbered and noted. Twelve of the 26 reviews indicated that errors do exist in the *OCF*—three resting content with indefinite and general reference to those errors. The remaining nine listed 86 mistakes that they had discovered. What knowledge of the motion picture must be possessed by the remaining 14 critics who fail to mention any inaccuracies at all!

None of the 86 errors noted by the critics is among the numerous ones mentioned at the opening of this section, and only seven of the 86 were noted by two critics, none by three or more. Many of the 86 were parlor trivia: What *was* John Garfield's real name? But why discuss trivia when the volume is so thoroughly shot through with substantial errors as to be basically untrustworthy?

Third, the issue of scope as evidenced by the 240 errors of omission that 16 of the 26 critiques thought warranted comment. Nine of those 240 were in one short critique (D. J. Wenden, *English Historical Review*), which detailed nine omissions from the *OCF* entry, PROPAGANDA. Wenden is correct in the omissions he noted, but his list of inadequacies demands too much of a one-volume reference work, mirroring his partisan interests and lack of general qualifications to review such a volume. He concludes: "The long section on propaganda is not up to the standard of most other entries."

The remaining 231 errors of omission are more germane. However, checking these omissions against the critics' preferred reference works highlights additional critical partisanship. About half of the names and terms sampled from among the 240 noted also fail to appear in the recommended alternatives to the *OCF*. This, too, seems to indicate that the critics' personal opinions and prejudices outweigh what ought to be logical critical judgment based on careful analysis.

The fourth category, extent of coverage given films, personalities, and concepts, is less amenable to quantification. Partisanship and irrelevance color the critical discussion. Does it matter if Bob Hope has a few lines more or less than Bing Crosby? Probably not. Does it matter if Vera Chytilová has an entry three times the length of Kenji Mizoguchi? Probably. *OCF*'s middle-European bias, particularly concerning Czechoslovakia, results in two, of eight total, color photographs from one film, Chytilová's *Sedmikrásky,* a film which is given extensive coverage in a reference work limited by spatial and economic constraints. The film's principals also are given extensive coverage: *Sedmikrásky's* co-writer and designer, Ester Krumbachová, intensified her collaboration with Němec during their marriage. Němec later married the singer, Marta Kubisová, while Chytilová married Jaroslav KUČERA —small capitals cross-referencing an entry that does *not* appear in the *OCF,* ending that particular marital merry-go-round.

Art Index, Book Review Digest, Book Review Index, Film Literature Index, Humanities Index, Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities, New York Times Index, and the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature.*

The fifth category of analysis is the volume's illustrations. Every film book faces the problem of whether to use more readily available, more sharply focused, generally more attractive, posed studio stills, or frame enlargements which present the image exactly as projected on the screen. (Or whether to rely on words alone.) The *OCF* opted for frame enlargements and chose 93 black-and-white, plus eight color, frame enlargements whose reproduction is poor insofar as general standards for printing halftones are concerned. Although these illustrations may not be bad for what they are, they are not very helpful to the reader. However, the chief complaint is not photographic reproduction, but the fact that the selections are often partisan, sometimes obscure, and generally do not communicate information commensurate with the space utilized. There is a half-page illustration of the dwarf Delphin; nine of 93 black-and-whites are from Renoir films, six from Eisenstein's; 21 films have two photographs while three have three. Add to such imbalance the fact that many hardly add to the understanding of their associated entries.

How did the 26 critics respond to this situation? Twelve made no mention of the photographs, five mentioned their existence but did not comment on their quality, and the remaining nine were divided, six negatively critical (illustrations reproduce "badly," "wretchedly," "muddily and execrably," "blurred and inaccurate," "lack crispness," and [frame enlargements are] "snobbish." There were three positive assessments: "excellent," "provide visual relief," and one critic "did admire . . . the . . . illustrations." In my own opinion, the book would have been far better (and could have been less expensive) without any illustrations, but perhaps would have been less viable commercially. Illustrated volumes, particularly in the visual arts, are more attractive. In this case, the poor quality and inappropriate selections vitiate their visual value.

Finally, the sixth category, a comparison of ideas, logic, and diction which underscore critical confusion—critical malfunction at its worst. It is unreasonable to expect critical consensus in matters of opinion, informed or otherwise. One's credulity is strained, however, as the critics contradict each other and themselves in matters of fact and logic. The preceding passages have noted numerous instances where the critics, for whatever reasons, have ignored external realities and internal contradictions. Take a moment to assess the logic underlying this process.

Larry Swindell (*American Film*) makes the most damning summation of the *OCF:* ". . . if the trivial information is abundantly erroneous, can the more important material be trusted? Of course, it cannot." That, from the man who nonetheless found splendor and disaster side-by-side in the *OCF*'s pages. David Badder (*Sight & Sound*) complains about the *OCF*'s ". . . predictably extensive coverage of over-familiar figures like Chaplin, Eisenstein and Fellini, but only skimpily ineffective assessments of, for example, Corman, Feuillade and Wajda." Those last three were not all that well-covered by the competition. To complain that a reference work extends substantial coverage to outstanding historical figures indicates a misunderstanding of the reference function. Nor is the reference function appropriately served when a volume requires constant verification. Yet, many of the essays, including Don Fredericksen's thoughtful critique in the *Journal of the University Film Association,* are marred by the erroneous conclusion that the *OCF* is acceptable, if verified.

Finally, so that no ox goes ungored, look at *Film Quarterly's* own evaluations. Ernest Callenbach's 82-word capsule recommendation, summarized with the phrase "A solid reference work," was followed two years later by Linda Provinzano's longer (over 500 words) and more laudatory effort, concluding: "More reference materials in this spirit will greatly contribute to film scholarship."

For critics, for encyclopedists, indeed for everyone, there remains a fundamental truth: whatever philosophical refinements recent thought may have given to the notion of facts, a decent respect for them remains the basis of all defensible opinions, interpretations, evaluations, and judgments. We cannot evade the need for a sound method for gathering and presenting reference information. If valid history is to be written, scholars must avoid the haphazard process whereby a group writes a reference volume, no one verifies or substantiates it, and critics, poorly prepared for

their task, endorse it. The historiographic standards outlined in this essay need to be applied with great rigor if the reference shelf is to become reliable.

Leslie Halliwell's multitude of editions and reprints illustrates another type of reference problem. Since 1965, when *The Filmgoer's Companion* appeared, followed by its numerous British and American editions, by the *Film Guide* (1977, 1979, 1981, 1982) and by the recent *Teleguide* (1979), Halliwell's writings have gained considerable circulation. Yet his work is fatally tainted by anti-intellectual snobbery and the usual plenitude of factual error. Were it not for its prevalence and influence, a simple dismissal would suffice. Here is Halliwell snottily discarding auteurism:

> *auteur.* A term used in the sixties and seventies by egghead critics to denote directors whom they judge to have a discernible message or attitude which runs throughout their work. Oddly enough the term is not applied to authors.

Such narrow, self-congratulatory, and ignorant views pervade Halliwell's writing. "The Cinema as Fun" from the "Introduction to his First Edition":

> . . . the book is aimed at the general filmgoer, not at the egghead student of film culture who shuns commercial entertainments in favor of middle-European or Oriental masterpieces which never get further than the National Film Theatre or a very few art houses.

Name-calling, appeals to success, Halliwell's own preferences as standards, and the idea that the motion picture is only a lazy and indolent entertainment devoid of meaning or cultural values—these are Halliwell's characteristic attitudes. His kind of fun, if one believes him, is the highest virtue of the film world. His prejudices, his lack of accuracy, and his lack of objectivity vitiate the potential such widely distributed handbooks possess. They need to be flagged: "Caution, hazardous to your love and understanding of the motion picture."

Reading Halliwell's dozen pages of prefatory materials suggest that one has in hand an accurate and reliable reference work. But his material is often in error, usually misleading, and admittedly biased toward Hollywood's "Golden Age" and its British equivalent. An otherwise decent article on the film musical, for example, is marred by an inaccurate sense of cause and effect, opening with the erroneous thought that "*musicals* obviously could not exist before Al Jolson sang 'Mammy,' in 1927." (Vitaphone reels with musicians antedated *The Jazz Singer.*)

"Hollywood" is an even more misleading entry. Contrary to Halliwell's information, Hollywood was not founded in 1912 by producers fleeing Patents Company pressures. It was founded in the late 1880's, incorporated in 1903, and consolidated with Los Angeles in 1910. Hollywood developed as a filming locale earlier than Halliwell has it, starting in 1909, and more because of climate and scenery than Trust pressures in the New York area. By 1912, the Trust's influence was waning. Forty years later, when the Hollywood studio system ended, it was because of television's inroads in the entertainment market and the *Paramount* decision which eliminated major studio vertically integrated control of production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures. Those facts, and the layoffs that followed the majors' loss of control, allowed independent production and stars as producers. But Halliwell merely contends that "Actors transformed themselves into independent producers and reduced the power of the 'front office'; stars now made the films they liked instead of the ones to which they were assigned." Such glib phrases demonstrate minimal understanding of the American entertainment business to which Halliwell is supposedly so devoted.

Halliwell's narrow viewpoint is countered by David Thomson's admittedly opinionated work at the other end of the spectrum: a "Personal, Opinionated and Obsessive Biographical Dictionary of Cinema." Despite those sentiments, the book has the appearance and title of a reference volume. But most of Thomson is opinion and should be assessed as such, particularly in view of his minimal understanding of motion picture techniques. From his Kuleshov entry:

> Kuleshov also liked experiments that cut together shots of people in farflung locations. He stated that, if the grammar or dynamics of cutting was fluent, then the celluloid spatial relationship—he called it 'artificial landscape' or 'creative geography'—was more important than real space. His stress on that seems to me

wrongheaded, but it is clearly a useful theory when dealing with Hitchcock and Fritz Lang, directors who often relate people by means of editing.

Kuleshov is "wrongheaded" in stressing "creative geography" rather than real space? Sounds good, but it is an invalid and misleading statement. There is no "real space" in motion pictures. The illusion of reality and of real space is created by production and editing techniques, one of which is "creative geography." That was Kuleshov's term for the motion picture's ability to stimulate the audience so that when viewing a film, they believe that the succession of shots indicates real spatial relationships, even though it is clear that those relationships seldom exist. An actor looks and points. The audience believes that the next image seen is what he was looking at, and what he was pointing at, and that he was there to look at it and point at it. But the actor may very well be on a studio set while the Eiffel Tower at which he points is not. This ability of editing to create illusions regarding reality is so basic to the structure of motion pictures that it is hard to take seriously a critic who imagines it to be "wrongheaded."

Some small glimmer of hope exists. There has been some recognition of the problem in these pages, in other publications, and in some of the materials generated by the American and British Film Institutes, the National Film Board of Canada and some professional organizations. The Library of Congress *Catalog of Motion Picture Copyright Entries,* the American Film Institute's *Catalog of Motion Pictures,* and their *Education Newsletter,* as well as other source materials now available in major libraries, provide sound reference materials.

Recently, volumes of the ambitious 16-volume *Magill's Survey of the Cinema* have appeared on reference shelves. The First Series (1980) contains 515 "essay-reviews" ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 words. They are printed in four volumes and include credits. The Second Series (six volumes, 751 essays) appeared in 1981. There are extensive indices, general essays on topics important for the study of the motion picture and an extremely weak "Brief Glossary of Cinema Terms" in Volume 1, Series I. Apparently the Third Series will deal with foreign films. *Magill's* seems promising, presenting a valuable range of carefully considered information.

Unhappily, the availability of accurate information has not restricted the flow of faulted materials, as this essay has shown. Nor are the more accurate, detailed materials as visible, as accessible, or as easily utilized as the encyclopedia articles and the popular, one-volume reference works herein criticized.

Three reference works do bear qualified recommendation: Raymond Spottiswoode's *Focal Encyclopedia,* primarily production and technical information, Ephraim Katz's *Film Encyclopedia,* and Georges Sadoul's *Dictionary of Films* and *Dictionary of Film-Makers.* The Sadoul and Katz are the work of individuals who were able to impose a consistent and well-balanced viewpoint on their work. In Spottiswoode's case, apparently he and his editorial board were able to exercise control over the ninety-some experts who contributed to that volume. Because personal preferences are less likely to surface in technical matters, this volume shows less partisanship than most. Yet the scope of all three is so broad that one must admit that errors do appear, sometimes simpleminded ones. Even Spottiswoode incorrectly defines "zoom," a term rarely defined correctly, although the *OCF* did so.

These recommended volumes project a clear understanding of the reference function: to provide broad, basic information to readers who wish to learn about what is, to them, a new field, or an unfamiliar aspect of a field. With all due respect to box-office success and cult adulation, Chaplin, Eisenstein, and Fellini have had far more influence than Andrzej Wajda, Roger Corman, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show.* However much one might personally prefer some of the latter group, information about the former is more helpful to a student or interested reader first learning about the motion picture. Making such judgments with a sense of what the motion picture is, and has been, is a difficult necessity. Historians and compilers of reference works need to set aside their personal tastes and passing interests. Current successes should be reported, but they are very difficult to evaluate. One needs to await their placement in historical perspective. Historians ought to resist the impulse to draw conclusions unwarranted by the facts or by the time.

While this yardstick may contain some subjective elements, it is possible to measure Katz, Sadoul, and Spottiswoode by their priorities and objectives. None of them seem quite so obsessive as the *Oxford Companion*. Katz and Sadoul eliminated illustrations as a luxury. Spottiswoode has numerous technical drawings, but in his case they are very necessary. Katz has no individual entries for motion pictures. He is content in describing major films as appropriate in his entries covering filmmakers, performers, or producers. Most significantly, Katz and Sadoul were willing to forego being everything to everyone. They were able to determine more and less important figures, films, and processes in motion picture history. Generally with minimal personal bias, they were able to weight their entries in a helpful way. In spite of some factual errors, these three are valuable. True, it is a qualified recommendation that cautions one is treading in dangerous waters, where danger can still surface. But at least in these cases the risks are minimal.

Under the circumstances, then, I suggest that a new generation of motion picture reference works need to be prepared. Until they are available, great care must be exercised in approaching the materials presently available for the study of the motion picture.

ROBERT STAM

Slow Fade to Afro: The Black Presence in Brazilian Cinema

North American movie-goers who have seen some of the recent films arriving from Brazil—*Amulet of Ogum, Tent of Miracles, Pixote, Bye Bye Brazil, Gaijin, Xica da Silva*—cannot but be struck by a racial tableau which is at once comfortably familiar and disconcertingly original. They have experienced the cultural products of a multi-ethnic society in many ways similar to our own, with substantial black, Indian, Japanese, German, Italian and Jewish communities. They have seen films marked by a strong black presence, from a country which includes the largest nation of African descent within the black diaspora. They have seen a wide variety of black roles: Pai Erlei, the *umbanda* priest of *Amulet;* Pedro Arcanjo, the culture-hero of *Tent of Miracles;* Dito, the sensitive delinquent of *Pixote;* Andorinha, the mute muscleman of *Bye Bye Brazil;* and Xica, the ex-slave turned power-behind-the-throne in *Xica da Silva*. My purpose here will be to sketch out the origins and background of this black presence, reflect on some of the issues raised by that presence, and draw some tentative conclusions within a cross-cultural perspective.[1]

Although blacks came into prominence in Brazilian cinema only in the sixties and seventies, they have never been entirely absent from Brazilian screens. The many films documenting Rio's carnival, beginning in 1901, inevitably featured the Afro-Brazilians who then formed a majority of Rio's population. The first black actor known to have performed in a fiction film was the circus clown Benjamin de Oliveira, who appeared as the Indian Peri in Antonio Leal's *Os Guaranis* (1907), an adaptation of an Indianist novel by José de Alencar. Real-life events also generated black screen appearances. The historical episode known as the "Revolta da Chibata" (the whip revolt) in which the black sailor João Candido led a revolt against corporal punishment in the Brazilian Navy, inspired both documentaries (*Revolta no Rio,* Revolt in Rio, 1910), and staged reconstructions like Lambertini's *A Vida do Cabo João Candido* (The Life of Commander João Candido, 1910)—the first Brazilian film to receive the ambiguous compliment of official censorship.

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Illustrations for this article courtesy of Fabiano Canosa and Embrafilm.

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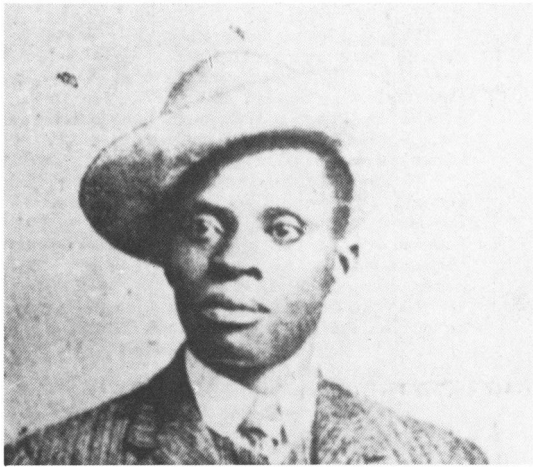
Zezé Motta as Xica da Silva

zilians did not feature prominently in the symbolically "white" cinema of the first few decades of this century. A number of factors account for this "structuring absence." Since the beginnings of Brazilian cinema coincided with the height of European imperialism, and since world cinema was dominated by the colonial powers, the tendency was to project a vision of Brazil as merely a tropical appendage of European civilization in which non-Europeans had very little role. The turn of the century also saw the propagation of social Darwinist ideologies of the kind lampooned in Dos Santos's *Tent of Miracles:* the black element, it was thought, contributed to Brazil's racial "degeneracy." Although no film of the first decades explicitly advances such an ideology—there is no Brazilian *Birth of a Nation*—one is struck by the frequent adaptations of Indianist novels in contrast with the general slighting of Afro-Brazilian themes. The celebration of the Indian as "brave warrior," the spiritual source and symbol of Brazil's nationhood, involved an element of bad faith toward both Indian and black. The exaltation of the disappearing Indian was dedicated to the very group being victimized by literal and cultural genocide. This ambiguous "compliment" was also a means of avoiding the vexed question of slavery. The proud history of black rebellions was ignored; the brave Indian, it was subtly insinuated, resisted slavery while blacks did not. The white literary and film-making elite, in sum, chose the safely distant and mythically connoted Indian over the more problematically present black, victim of a slavery abolished just ten years before Segreto filmed the first Brazilian "views" in 1898.

Much of the early film production, furthermore, was the work of Italian immigrants like Segreto. And while these immigrants bore no responsibility for the institution of slavery and were often themselves the objects of exploitation—a situation clearly registered in Tizuka Yamasaki's *Gaijin*—collectively they were the winners, and blacks the losers, of this period of Brazilian history. Immigrant film-makers



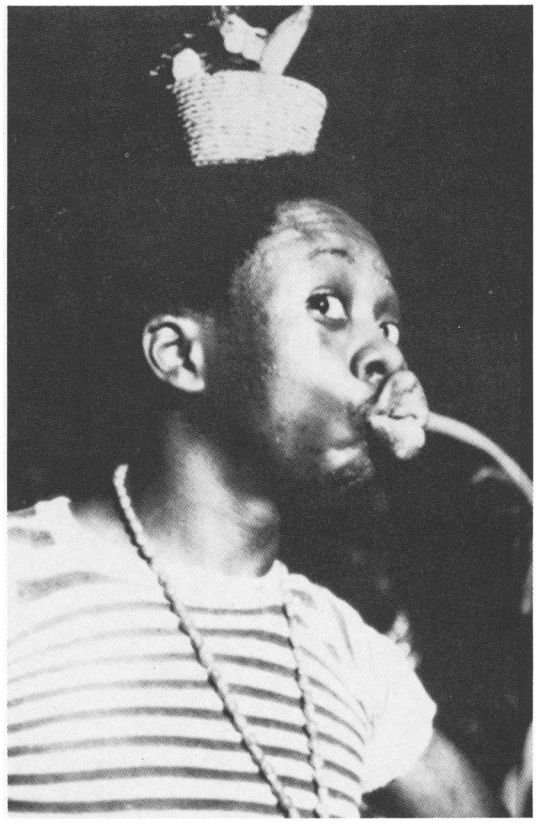
Benjamin de Oliviera

were obviously not eager to filmically explore the oppressive situation of the very group that they themselves had economically displaced. A rare apparent exception to this rule is Antonio Marques Filho's 1929 adaptation of Bernardo Guimarães's sentimental abolitionist novel *A Escrava Isaura* (1875). The implicitly racist novel regards Isaura's enslavement as uniquely tragic because of her "ivory" skin, and the film perpetuates this vision by having the white actress Elisa Betty play the title role, much as American films like *Pinky* cast white actresses as "tragic mulattoes."

In the thirties, the situation of blacks improved somewhat as immigration declined and ideological winds shifted. The Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, a student of the anti-racist Franz Boas, formulated the theory of "racial democracy." Although now seen as sentimental and colonialist, an exemplum of the "ideology of whitening," Freyre's work constituted a progressive step at the time by emphasizing the positive contribution of blacks to Brazil's cultural mix. And if Brazilian cinema of the silent era was symbolically "white," the cinema of the ensuing decades might be called "mulatto." Blacks became a significant presence with the *chanchadas*—Rio-based comedies featuring musical numbers and carnivalesque themes—which dominated production from the mid-thirties through the late fifties. Partially modelled on American musicals, the *chanchadas* featured blacks and mulattoes in minor or background roles, while generally fostering an ideal of whiteness reminiscent of Busby Berkeley or Esther Williams musicals. Despite occasional exceptions—Mauro's *Favela dos Meus Amores* (Favela of My Loves, 1935) features the musicians of the Portela Samba School—most *chanchadas* use blacks as background and foil for the love intrigues of white stars like Eliane Macedo and Cyl Farney. Although samba was largely an Afro-Brazilian contribution, the product of the primarily black *morros* (hills) of Rio, film after film gave the impression that samba was a white cultural product.

An exception to this tendency, surprisingly, came from a North American director. In 1942 Orson Welles went to Brazil to film two episodes of the never-to-be-finished *It's All True,* a semi-documentary aimed at fostering the Good Neighbor policy and countering Nazi propaganda in Latin America. Welles, a jazz-lover who had produced an all-black Macbeth for the Federal Theatre, was introduced to the *favelas* and to the samba by Vinicius de Moraes, a poet and film critic later to become famous as a composer-singer and the author of the source play for *Black Orpheus.* Welles became a samba and carnival enthusiast and organized the Rio episodes around two central characters, a five-year old boy and a samba school leader desperate over the destruction of Praça Onze, the Rio square through which the samba of the *morros* traditionally entered the city.

It's All True was to feature the brilliant black actor Sebatião Prata (Grande Otelo), whom Welles reportedly characterized as one of the finest comic actors of the twentieth century. Grande Otelo has acted in over a hundred feature films—from Burle's *Moleque Tião* (1943) to Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982)—and has figured prominently in all the crucial phases of Brazilian cinema since the forties. He was inspired to work in film by the presence of a black boy (Farina) in the American "Our Gang" series; Otelo wanted to be the black boy in a Brazilian equivalent series. Paired at first with the white actor Oscarito and later with Ankito, Otelo became the "king of the chanchadas." Unlike the servant-master pattern that prevailed in the black-white friendships in Hollywood films of the same period, there was a rough equality between Otelo and his white co-stars. Otelo's persona was invariably sympathetic; he often played the *malandro,* the urban survivor who got by thanks to



Grande Otelo in It's All True

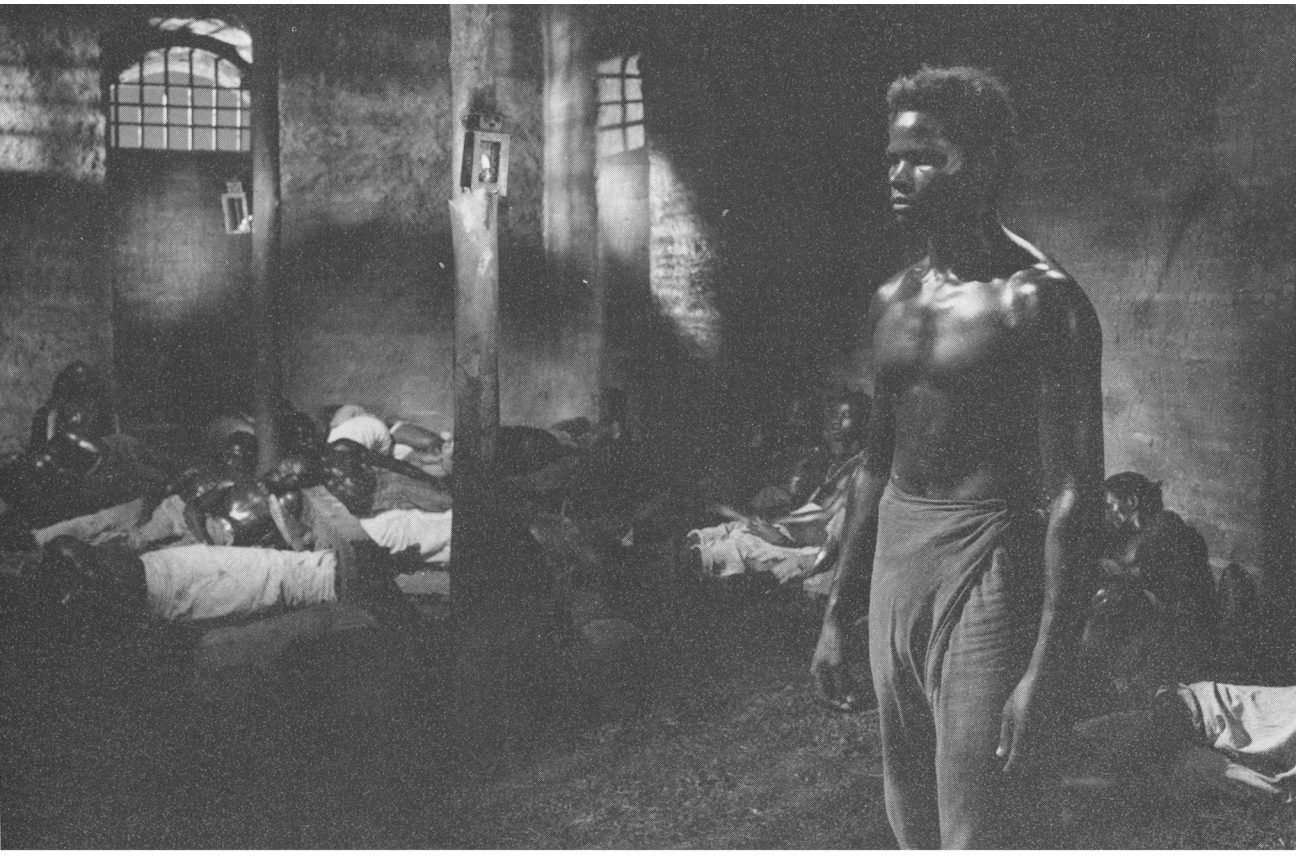
a glib tongue and a quick imagination. He was treated, however, as comically asexual; the love intrigues were left to his white partners.

Grande Otelo's roles have been extremely diverse. In 1949 he played in the first Brazilian film to confront the problem of *contemporary* racial discrimination: José Carlos Burle's *Tambem Somos Irmãos* (We Too are Brothers). The film, of which, unfortunately, no copy survives, was a Brazilian example of the "problem film" genre then popular in Hollywood. The story, according to the director's account of it, concerned a wealthy widower who adopts four children, of whom two are white and two are black, a situation which becomes the pretext for denouncing the discrimination to which black Brazilians are subjected. Otelo's other roles include the samba composer in *Rio Zona Norte,* the frustrated screenwriter in *Ladrões de Cinema* (Cinema Thieves), and the carnivalesque astronaut launched from "Cape Carnival" in *Os Cosmonautas* (the Cosmonauts). In *As Aventuras de Robinson Crusoe* (The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe), he subverts Defoe's colonialist classic by playing a Friday who refuses to accept the colonizer's power to name, telling the Englishman: "*Me* Crusoe, *you* Friday!" His most internationally famous role, of course, was as the black lead in *Macunaíma,* where his comic gifts and box-office appeal helped guarantee the artistic and commercial success of the film.

Eliane Macedo in Rio Fantasia, *a* chanchada

In the late 1940's a group linked to São Paulo's industrial bourgeoisie, inspired by the commercial success of the *chanchada* but scorning what it saw as that genre's vulgarity, founded the Vera Cruz Film Company, modelled on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios in Hollywood. Vera Cruz set up a luxurious system with contract stars and directors but without the economic infrastructure on which to base such a system. Vera Cruz was a kind of ephemeral fantasy of São Paulo capitalism enacted by English technicians, Italian directors, and right-wing Brazilian writers under the guidance of Brazilian-born but highly Europeanized Alberto Cavalcanti. There was little room in Vera Cruz's just-like-Europe classiness for black or mulatto faces. Apart

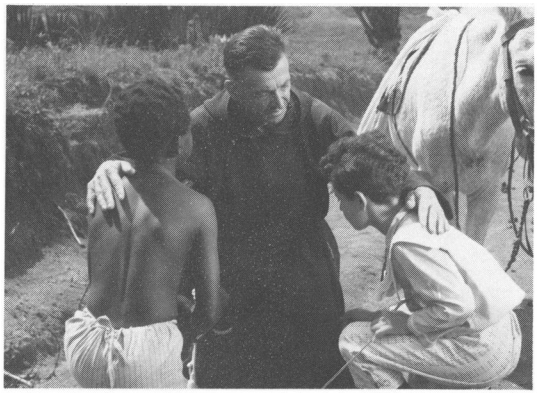
Grande Otelo in As Aventuras de Robinson Crusoe



SINHA MOÇA

from the many films featuring black maids (usually played by Ruth de Souza), only one Vera Cruz film focussed on a black theme: *Sinhá Moça* (1953). A costume drama set around the time of Abolition, the film shows the institution of slavery in all its horror and provides glimpses of black anger and revolt. The revolt, interestingly, comes not from the blacks in the "big house"—who have to have the need for abolition explained to them by white abolitionists!—but from the field laborers from the *senzala* (slave quarters). Based on a novel by a Brazilian woman (Maria Dezonne Pacheco Fernandes), *Sinhá Moça* also suggests a parallel between the heroine's personal revolt against what we now call patriarchy and the black and white abolitionist struggle against slavery. Unfortunately, the film systematically privileges its white stars Eliane Lage and Anselmo Duarte (as is obvious from a look at the publicity stills) and idealizes the abolitionist movement. Unlike the Cuban film *El Otro Francisco* (The Other Francisco), *Sinhá Moça* completely elides the economic forces and motivations shaping the abolitionist movement.

Oswaldo Censoni's *João Negrinho* (1954) displays an even more paternalistic view of slavery and abolition. The narrative is embroidered around the flashback memories of João Negrinho, an elderly ex-slave. As a child, João is befriended by the slave-owner's son Chiquinho; scenes of the pre-pubic boys fishing might remind a North American of Huck and Jim on their Mississippi raft. Chiquinho constantly protects and intercedes for a João Negrinho portrayed as but minimally competent and perpetually in need of dramatic rescue. A saintly priest, meanwhile, a tender-hearted nineteenth-century integrationist, counsels the two friends. He preaches universal love but practices a double standard which asks for "understanding" from Chiquinho but demands "obedience" from João Negrinho. While the film apparently presents all events from João's point of view so as to enlist our complete sympathy, what the film enlists our sympathy *for* is in fact a racist vision. The final sequence of post-abolition camaraderie, intended as a celebration of the brave new world of "racial democracy," inadvertently offers clues to the subsequent oppression of blacks in Brazil. A new generation, presum-

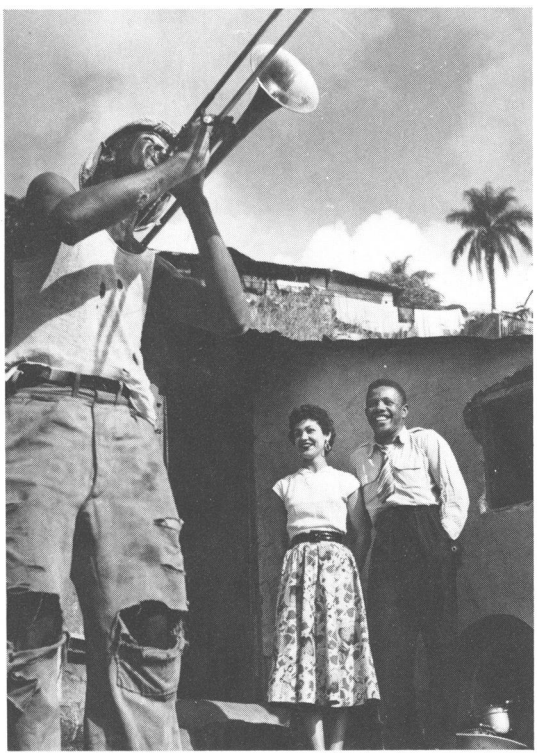


JOAO NEGRINHO

ably charitable and egalitarian, has taken over from racist slaveholders like Chico's father, but the final shot shows João driving two white friends from a celebratory banquet in a horse and carriage. Although metaphorically "in the driver's seat," in symbolic terms he has merely been promoted from slave to servant.[2]

The major exceptions to the paternalism of the fifties were Nelson Pereirá dos Santos's *Rio 40 Graus* (Rio 40 Degrees, 1954) and *Rio Zona Norte* (1957). The former film treats a typical Sunday in the life of Rio de Janeiro and "stars" the cariocas themselves. Nelson consistently highlights the blackness of Rio. The characters who provide the human and rhetorical "glue" linking the diverse episodes are the peanut vendors, largely black, who descend from the *favelas* and fan out across the city. Unlike the *chanchadas,* the film takes the existential dilemmas of its black characters seriously, according them the unpretentious sympathy and solidarity which is the hallmark of Nelson's work. *Rio Zona Norte,* meanwhile, focuses on the samba composer Espirito (Grande Otelo) and the economic exploitation of which he is the object. In both films, blacks form part of a multi-racial mass of oppressed Brazilians; racial categories are subsumed under social and economic ones.

RIO 40 GRAUS



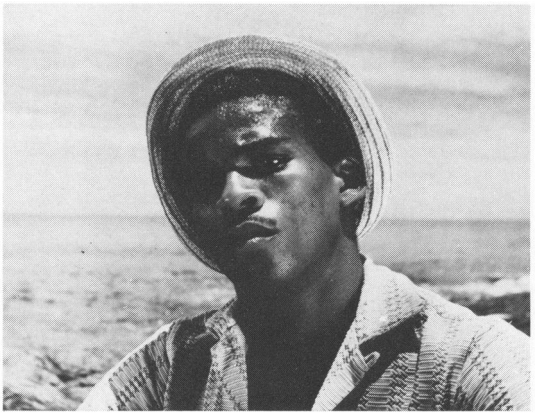
In the wake of dos Santos's pioneering efforts, the Cinema Novo directors of the sixties searched out the dimly illuminated corners of Brazilian life—the *favela* and the *sertão*—and created what might be called a symbolically "black" cinema, in which black Brazilians had a crucial role. Triguerinho Neto's *Bahia de Todos os Santos* paved the way with its unsentimental depiction of racial and social oppression in Bahia, the most Africanized metropolis in Brazil. The film's protagonist Tonio is the Brazilian character who most closely resembles the "tragic mulatto" figure familiar from American films and literature. He is the man in between, divided between black mother and white father, between *candomblé* and nightclub, between traditional community and urban individualism. No believer in "racial democracy," he tells a friend: "They say that everything is easy, that color doesn't matter, but it's just empty words." Tonio is also the reluctant sexual object of the

BAHIA DE TODOS SANTOS

Englishwoman Miss Collins, played by Vera Cruz veteran Lola Brah, a bit of casting whereby the film hints at an association between colonial exploitation and colonized cinema. An insistent homosexual subtext—the director abandoned film-making when Jurandir Pimental, his lover and the Tonio of the film, committed suicide shortly before the première—suggests a possible alliance between blacks and homosexuals as oppressed groups, unfortunately at the expense of women as objects of their mutual hostility.

Like *Bahia de Todos os Santos,* Duarte's *Pagador de Promessas* (The Given Word, 1962) and Rocha's *Barravento* (1962) form part of the "Bahian Renaissance," the cinematic rediscovery of the cultural riches of Salvador, Bahia. The former film centers on the vow of its protagonist, Zé-of-the-Donkey, to bring a cross to the Church of Saint Barbara in gratitude for the miraculous cure of his donkey. The priest refuses him entrance because the vow was proffered at a *candomblé* shrine. The film then pits *candomblé* priestess against Catholic priest and *berimbau* against church bell, as the people of Bahia, largely black and mulatto, support Zé's right to enter the Church. Anti-clerical rather than anti-Christian, Duarte contrasts the sincere Christ-like faith of Zé with the ossified Christianity of the priest. The practitioners of *candomblé,* meanwhile, are shown as sympathetic but misguided, and Duarte underlines Zé's separation from *candomblé* by having him refuse repeated invitations to visit the *terreiro.* The film evokes a kind of revolution by having the people take over an institution, yet the "revolution" consists, ultimately, only in gaining entrance to a more ecumenically tolerant Catholic Church.[3]

O Pagador de Promessas: *Zé's initial vow*



Firmino (Antonio Pitango) in Barravento

If *The Given Word* implicitly condemns *candomblé* from the point of view of ecumenical Catholicism, *Barravento* would seem to critique Afro-Brazilian religion from the standpoint of historical materialism. The film shows the oppression inflicted on poor black fishermen and apparently denounces the role of *candomblé* in legitimating this oppression. The protagonist Firmino, back from the city, tells his brothers and sisters to forsake religion to fight oppression. But the surface condemnation of *candomblé* is contradicted by three of the film's deep structural features: (1) the poetic celebration, affectionate and exalted, of the sensuous *mise-en-scène* of *candomblé;* (2) the insistence, through costume, gesture, and montage, on Firmino's isolation from his fellow villagers; and (3) the crucial ambiguity, pointed out by Ismail Xavier, in the film's system of explanation: all the narrative events can be explained either in a materialist manner *or* as evidence of the truth and efficacity of Afro-Brazilian religion.[4]

Carlos Diegues's *Ganga Zumba* (1963) memorializes the seventeenth-century fugitive slave republic called Palmares, a republic which lasted almost a century in the face of repeated assaults from both the Dutch and the Portuguese. Based on João Felicio dos Santos's novel of the same name, the film focuses on a fugitive black slave whose odyssey leads him to Palmares. A Fanonian ode to black liberation, the film assumes a black perspective throughout. It shows blacks not as mere victims but as active agents who take their destiny in their own hands. While the colonized Brazil of the coast was impoverished and politically repressed, blacks were constructing a

GANGA ZUMBA: *slave slays master*

communitarian republic in the mountains of the interior. (Diegues is currently planning to further explore the implications of this seventeenth-century "utopia" in a remake of *Ganga Zumba,* based on more recent historical research by Decio Freitas, to be entitled simply *Palmares.*)

In the second phase of Cinema Novo, extending roughly from 1964 through the coup-within-the-coup of December 1968, film-makers turned away from *favela* and *sertão* to examine themselves and the failure of the project of the populist left. Since the film-makers were generally white middle-class intellectuals, blacks and mulattoes tend not to be a strong presence in the films of this period. (The exception that proves the rule is the character Calunga (Pitanga) the imaginative *malandro* of Carlos Diegues' *Grande Cidade* (The Big City, 1965), but even he can be seen as a *magister ludi* figure who stands in for the director himself). It is only with the third "tropicalist" phase that black characters and themes reappear in force. Joaquin Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1969), based on the novel by the mulatto writer Mario de Andrade, highlights blackness as one of the essential threads in the Brazilian racial fabric. Two sequences in which the black Macunaíma (Grande Otelo) turns white, occasionally misread as racist by North American audiences, are in fact satirical barbs directed at the "ideology of whitening" and at the "economic miracle."[5] The film lampoons racist attitudes. Explaining why black Jigue was arrested rather than himself, his white brother Manaape cites the popular maxim: "A white man running is a champion; a black man running is

GRANDE OTELO *in MACUNAIMA*

a thief." In another tropicalist film, Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes* (1969), meanwhile, the character "nego Antão" (black Antão) encapsulates Afro-Brazil as he moves from colonized passivity to armed revolt, ultimately becoming the "holy warrior" who slays the reactionary landowner, "the dragon of evil."

One film, Antunes Filho's *Compasso de Espera* (Marking Time, released 1973), had the courage to inventory the racist features of Brazilian society. *Compasso* focuses on Jorge de Oliveira (Zozimo Balbul), a black poet and advertising agent. Romantically involved with an older white woman, Jorge publishes books of poetry with the help of a childless white millionaire who spiritually adopts him and becomes his artistic sponsor. The impeccably dressed, dignified, articulate Jorge at first glance resembles a number of Sidney Poitier characters, but he lacks the moral stature of the Poitier persona. Successful but dependent on white benevolence, he is internally rent by the contradictory roles he is called upon to play. A partisan of Martin Luther King-style non-violence, Jorge is pressured from the left by his militant separatist friend Assis (Pitanga). (Indeed, their discussions of alternative strategies for black liberation could as well take place in New York as in São Paulo; perhaps the achievement of the film is to show that the two realities are not so far apart.) To Assis's "Burn Baby Burn" Jorge answers, in English, "Build Baby Build!" When Jorge becomes infatuated with Cristina, a young white daughter of the São Paulo bourgeoisie, he becomes the object of racist slurs first from her family and then from a band of rednecks who seem more imported from the Hollywood south than authentic in Brazilian terms. In any case, Jorge's attempt to be at once distinguished author, defender of black rights, devoted family member, and faithful lover to two white women ultimately exacts a terrible toll in fatigue and existential confusion.

Compasso exposes the myriad forms of racism, from gestures of condescension to acts of discrimination and even physical violence. Jorge cites Millór Fernandes's ironic dictum that "there is no racism in Brazil because black people know their place." Antunes mocks a compendium of racist clichés: that the problem isn't racial but social; that Pelé's success proves the absence of discrimination;

Compasso de Espera

that good blacks have "white souls." In his advertising work, Jorge is virtually obliged to design ads that idealize whiteness (a real tendency easily confirmed by a quick perusal of Brazilian magazines). Even the "charity" of Jorge's *padrinho*-protector goes back to the period of slavery, when the frequency of white-black sexual involvement led well-off whites to adopt and protect their "illegitimate" offspring.

Compasso was rightly criticized for focusing on a highly unrepresentative character, a kind of Brazilian equivalent to American television's *Julia*. Living in a luxurious apartment, constantly sipping whiskey at cocktail parties, Jorge represents an infinitesimal minority of black Brazilians. Jorge is less representative of blacks than of the anguished artist-intellectuals of a particularly repressive period in Brazilian history. Antunes turns Jorge into an exemplar of the intellectuals' passivity and frustration. Stylistically, *Compasso* is a highly colonized film. The parties recall *La Dolce Vita;* the lighting recalls *film noir;* the hortatory tone recalls Stanley Kramer. In short, the film was made as if all the decolonizing achievements of Cinema Novo had been for nought. The sound track mixes abstract percussion, Erik Satie and Blood Sweat and Tears, completely ignoring the black musical presence in São Paulo, with its samba schools and avant-garde performers. In short, the film never intimates the existence of a cultural alternative to the alienated white world in which Jorge is immersed. Naively integrationist, the film pleads for "tolerance"; it lacks any deeper social, economic, political or cultural analysis. And it never suggests the possibility of characters such as Jorge uniting with other blacks and mulattoes and progressive whites in a move-

ment which would radically restructure Brazilian society.

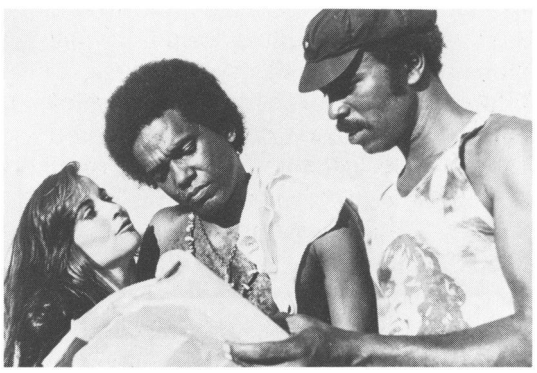
The films of the seventies are remarkable for the range and variety of black roles. Rocha's *Der Leone Have Sept Cabeças* (The Lions Have Seven Heads, 1970) animates allegorical figures representing the colonizer and colonized in conflict in the Third World. The black characters include Zumbi (named after the founder of Palmares), the symbol of the African revolution and the black diaspora, Samba, the symbol of Afro culture, and Xobu, the corrupt colonized puppet. Other black characters of the seventies include the black *cangaceiro* of *Faustão* (1975); the powerful ex-slave who dominates eighteenth-century Minas Gerais in *Xica da Silva* (1976); the black favelado film-makers of *Ladrões de Cinema* (*Cinema Thieves,* 1977); the black intellectual and culture-hero Pedro Arcanjo in *Tent of Miracles* (1977); and the Bahian in love with American detective films—to the point of wearing a trench coat in the tropics—in *J. S. Brown O Ultimo Heroi* (J. S. Brown, The Last Hero, 1979).

Cinema Thieves

The seventies film which most outrageously confounds all stereotypes is Antonio Carlos Fontoura's *Rainha Diaba* (Devil Queen, 1975). The title character, played with forceful brilliance by Milton Gonçalves (the Jigue from *Macunaíma*), is a black drag queen and underworld chieftain. (The character's real-life prototype, a black transvestite hoodlum known as Madame Satan, wielded power in Rio's notorious Lapa District.) *Rainha Diaba* makes surprisingly little of the blackness of its protagonist. When some hoodlums revolt against his rule, it is because they refuse to be bossed by a drag queen, not because he is black. Devil Queen himself is a veritable palimpsest of supposedly irreconcilable figures—eminently black, eminently gay, and eminently macho boss. The legend on his T-shirt—"Freak!"—evokes his constituency, the community of the marginalized, all those that society turns into freaks.

The seventies also marked the emergence of the first socially significant black directors. In the fifties, Haroldo Costa, a black impresario from Rio, had directed a sophisticated film (*Um Desconhecido Bate à Porta,* A Stranger Knocks at the Door, 1958) set in a white upper-class milieu, but it was only in the seventies that certain black directors, generally the spiritual sons of Cinema Novo, made films touching on black themes. Waldyr Onofre's *Aventuras Amorosas de um Padeiro* (Amorous Adventures of a Baker, 1975) animates a gallery of characters typical of Rio's Northern Zone, and largely succeeds in the director's professed goal of treating black characters simply as ordinary people. The most interesting character is Saul, a poet-sculptor-actor-lover, who complains that "they'll never let a black man play Hamlet, I'll have to spend my life playing Othello." Apart from a punning reference to Grande Otelo, his complaint doubtless reflects the black artist-intellectual's frustration at the restricted opportunities open to him. Other black-directed films include Odilon Lopes's *Um é Pouco, Dois é Bom* (One is Little, Two is Fine, 1977) and the Nigerian director Ola Balogun's *A Deusa Negra* (The Black Goddess, 1978), the first Brazilian-Nigerian co-production. A *Roots* in reverse, the film concerns a Nigerian who goes to Brazil to look for his relatives.

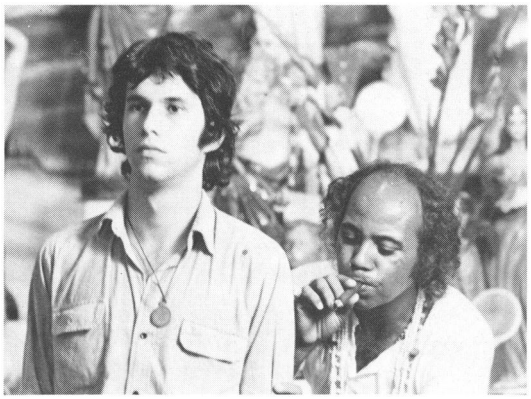
Waldyr Onofre (right) directing Aventuras Amorosas de um Padeiro



Antonio and Teresina in Pitanga's IN THE WORLD'S MOUTH

Of all the films by black directors, Antonio Pitanga's *Na Boca do Mundo* (In the World's Mouth, 1977) is perhaps the most provocative. The film posits a love triangle linking the black Antonio (a provincial service-station attendant), the ambitious mulata Teresinha, and the wealthy white woman Clarisse. Antonio ultimately loses both women when Teresinha departs for Rio with Clarisse. The racial schematism of the plot suggests a social allegory, confirmed by Antonio Pitanga in interviews, in which a woman who takes advantage of what Carl Degler calls the "mulatto escape hatch" conspires with a wealthy white to oppress poor blacks like Antonio. But while Pitanga's film suggests that the anomalies of Brazilian racism make mulattoes the enemies of blacks, other black-directed films, such as those of Onofre and Lopes, evoke a possible alliance between black men and women as being analogously oppressed, an alliance that remains problematic to the extent that "women" tends to mean "white women," while black women are left on the margins, doubly oppressed as blacks and as women, with no allies at all.

The seventies also reveal a startling transformation in the attitude of white directors toward Afro-Brazilian culture. Whereas sixties Cinema Novo films tended to ignore or deny the legitimacy of Afro-Brazilian culture, many of the films of the seventies make of that culture the source of all that is most vital in Brazilian life. Dos Santos's *Amuleto de Ogum* (Ogum's Amulet, 1975), for example, celebrates the syncretic Afro-Brazilian religion called *umbanda.* Brazil's fastest-growing religion, *umbanda* combines Afro-Brazilian elements—the *orixas,* the centrality of spirit possession—with Catholicism, Cabala, and the spiritism of Allan Kardec. *Umbanda* is often said to be *the* Brazilian religion in that it incorporates elements from the major races constitutive of Brazilian identity. Dos Santos here aims to be "popular" not only in his choice of subject matter but also in perspective, discarding all vestiges of superiority and whole-heartedly affirming the values of the milieu depicted and the spectators to whom he hopes to appeal. Dos Santos virtually *re-*



OGUM'S AMULET: *Gabriel (Ney Sant'ana) with the authentic* umbanda *priest (Pai Erley)*

Juarez Paraiso as Pedro Arcanjo in TENT OF MIRACLES

quires the spectator to become an *umbandista,* at least for the duration of the film, if only in order to understand the narrated events. The film simply assumes *umbandista* values, without explaining them to the uninitiated. A Catholic audience, the director points out, need only see a priest raising the host to know a mass is being celebrated. An *umbandista* audience, similarly, recognizes the ceremony which "closes" the protagonist's body, recognizes his protection by Ogum, the warrior divinity and symbol, in Brazil, of the struggle for justice. It recognizes the voice of the *preto velho* (the old slave who possesses mediums of all colors) and the provocative manners of the *pomba-gira* (evil in the form of woman). At the same time, the film does not idealize *umbanda:* one *umbanda* priest in the film works for popular liberation; the other is a greedy charlatan and opportunist.

Amuleto's endorsement of *umbanda* did not go unchallenged. Some argued that the director's uncritical stance constituted an abdication of intellectual responsibility. Dos Santos answered that the same intellectuals who laud "popular culture" often despise its most expressive forms such as religion. Religious purists, meanwhile, argued that *umbanda* itself constituted an illegitimate whitening of *candomblé.* In its defiant Brazilianness, they argued, *umbanda* turned its back on Mother Africa. While *candomblé* is communal, *umbanda* is individualistic and therapeutic, "the poor man's couch." Without taking a position on this convoluted debate, we can affirm that *Amuleto* accords respectful treatment to an Africanized, if not purely African, religion, while showing the multi-racial participation in that religion. The film is indeed "popular" in the deepest sense of that word.

The same director's *Tenda dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles, 1976), meanwhile, debunks certain racial myths while perpetuating others. Here the black culture-hero Pedro Arcanjo (a composite figure based on a number of self-taught black intellectuals from Bahia) defends the Afro-Brazilian spiritual inheritance first against the fashionably racist and "scientific" theories of Professor Nilo Argilo and then against the clubs and guns of the police. Deployed across two time-frames, *Tent of Miracles* suggests that the ideologically explicit and politically violent racism of the past has merely transmuted itself into the subtler racism of the contemporary mass-media. In this sense, the film discredits the myth of "racial democracy." On the other, it promotes the notion of miscegenation as social panacea. And the film's generational progression from black Pedro to his mulatto son Tadeu and his white bride Lou suggests a parable of whitening as "progress," an idea whose implicit racism has been denounced by Abdias de Nascimento and Muniz Sodré among others.

Much of the literature on blacks in North American cinema revolves around the existence of specific stereotypes: lazy Samboes, servile Toms, obese mammies, libidinous bucks, and tragic mulattoes. The temptation, for North American critics, is to look for these same stereotypes in Brazilian cinema. But while there are analogies between the *mãe preta* and the "mammy," between Pai João and

Uncle Tom, it would be simplistic and misleading to stretch any of these analogies too far. It would be tempting, for example, to see the black Macunaíma, whose favorite expression is "Ai que preguiça!" (literally, "What laziness!"), as a Brazilian version of Stepin Fetchit, the archetypal "coon" of the thirties. But such an interpretation would scarcely do justice to the character or the film. Macunaíma is a multiple, contradictory character, who is by turns stupid, brilliant, lazy, and enterprising. These qualities are not correlated with race; the white Macunaíma displays the same diversity, and the same fondness for the expression "Que preguiça!" We can conclude that Mario de Andrade the writer and Joaquim Pedro the film-maker are caricaturing what they see as an occasional Brazilian trait common to all races. A more sophisticated methodology would also beware of "genre mistakes." A search for "positive images" in the culturally coded carnival of *Macunaíma* would be fundamentally misguided. Both film and novel belong to a carnivalesque parodic genre which animates not rounded three-dimensional characters but rather two-dimensional "grotesques." Virtually all the characters, white, black and mulatto, exhibit elements of the grotesque. Indeed, the film's most archly grotesque characters are Pietro-Pietra, the white industrialist-cannibal, and his ghoulish spouse.

Take, as another example, the figure of the "tragic mulatto." Certain characters—Tonio in *Bahia de Todos os Santos,* Jorge in *Compasso de Espera*—would seem to recall the tragic mulatto figure common in North American cinema and literature. The context, however, is radically different. North American society, for historical reasons, has tended to divide along clear racial lines. The North American vision inclines toward binarism: white *or* black. The Brazilian system is more complex; its spectrum nuances shades from *preto retinto* (dark black) through *mulato escuro* (dark mulatto) and *mulato claro* (light mulato) through *moreno* and *branco de Bahia* (Bahia-style white). Brazilian racism consists not in a binary white-over-black but rather in the superimposition of an official integrationist ideology ("racial democracy") on a reality pervaded by a subtle prejudice that white is better. (This prejudice is visualized on the 500 Cruzeiro bill, which shows a frieze of five faces "progressing" from a clearly black face in profile on the left to a full-front light mestiço on the right). Brazil has never been a segregated society; its racism operates within a kind of intimacy and in this sense it resembles sexism more than North American racism. The racism of Brazil is not the virulent hatred of southern or northern rednecks but rather the quiet paternalism of role stereotyping. The notion of "passing for white," so crucial in films like *Pinky* and *Imitation of Life,* has little relevance in Brazil, where it is often said with a laugh that all Brazilian families have "one foot in the kitchen," i.e., that they all have a black ancestor somewhere in the family, a point comically demonstrated in *Tent of Miracles* when Pedro Arcanjo reveals his racist enemy Nilo Argilo, the rabid critic of "mongrelization," to be himself part black.

An ethnocentric vision based on North-American cultural patterns often leads to the "racializing" of situations that Brazilians would not see as racially connoted. The millenial cult-leader Sebastião in *Black God, White Devil* (1964), for example, is played by the black actor Lídio Silva. The historical prototype for the role was not black; Rocha chose Silva for his imposing physiognomy and his style of acting. Nor does the film ever call attention to race. Yet, the American translation of the Portuguese title racializes the film. The Portuguese reads *Deus e Diabo na Terra do Sol*—God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun—while the American *Black God, White Devil* lends a racial connotation not present in the original title or in the film.

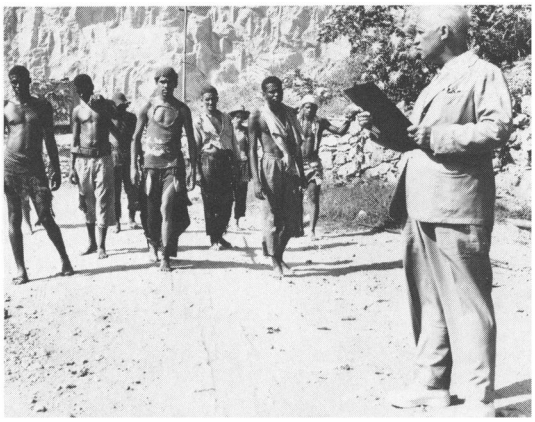
Since blacks, except as actors, have had a minimal role in the actual scripting, directing and producing of Brazilian films, they have tended to be pawns in a chess game controlled by others: black souls as white man's artifact. Cinema Novo film-makers, even when speaking of *favela* and *sertão,* often seem to be really talking about themselves, projecting onto black characters like Firmino in *Barravento* or Jorge in *Compasso de Espera,* superficially different from themselves, their own situation as white middle-class intellectuals in a highly stratified society. What is clear is that many white film-makers have *wanted* to portray Afro-Brazilian culture sympathetically. Antonio Carlos Fontoura's *Cordão de Ouro* (Golden Cord, 1977), Iberé Cavalcanti's *Forca*

GOD AND THE DEVIL IN THE LAND OF THE SUN

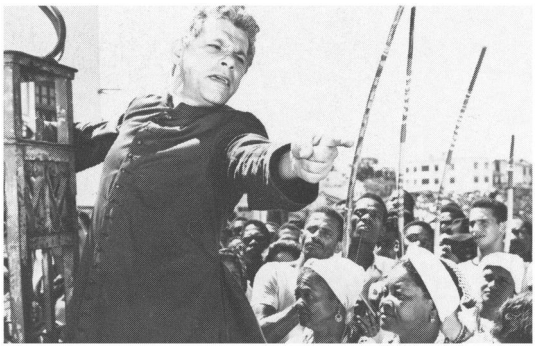
de Xango (Xango's Power, 1979) and Vera de Figueiredo's *Samba de Criacão do Mundo* (Samba of the Creation of the World, 1979), for example, are all white-directed tributes to the power and beauty of Afro-Brazilian culture. But some of these tributes provoked resentment among black Brazilians. *Xica da Silva* was criticized for its portrayal of black woman as sex object, and *Tent of Miracles* was censured for its "parable of whitening." But the hostility was by no means universal in the black community. Blacks, whites and mulattoes "voted with their feet" for *Xica* by attending the film in droves and by dancing in the aisles of the movie theaters. And Lelia Gonzales, a leading spokesperson for both feminism and black liberation, dismissed the attack on *Xica* as puritanical, arguing that *Xica* was in some ways a very black film, a hymn to the vitality of black culture.

Only in the seventies do we have a body of films by black film-makers to compare to the larger corpus of films by white film-makers. But the evidence here is ambiguous. The black directors, quite unmilitant, seem content to portray black characters simply as people like other people without making larger political points. The aggressivity of *Na Boca do Mundo,* an apparent exception to this rule, is directed more at what is seen as mulatto treason than at white oppression. The other constant of the black-directed films, apart from an auteurist interest in personal expression, is a tendency to articulate racial and political questions together with sexual ones. Although Brazil never knew the white sexual paranoia—analyzed by Calvin Herndon in *Sex and Racism*—that North America projected onto the black man, the repeated references in these films to white male hostility to black or mulatto sexual relations with white women suggests that the quotient of white neurosis might be higher than at first appears.

Much of the literature on race relations in Brazil (Bastide, Cardoso, Fernandes, Degler, Harris, Hasenbelg) focuses on the interarticulation of race and class. The films of the early sixties, following the line of the orthodox Communist Party-led left, tend to subordinate race to class. *Cinco Vezes Favela* (Five Times Favela, 1962), sponsored by the leftist Centers for Popular Culture, in some ways typifies the political approach of these films. Each of the five shorts composing the film makes a clear didactic point: that *favelados*



Workers confront boss in Leon Hirszman's episode of Cinco Vezes Favela



O Pagador de Promessas

steal out of economic necessity ("Um Favelado"); that *favelados* are homeless because of exploitative landlords ("Zé da Cachorra"); that *favelados* should abandon the escapism of samba for serious political organizing ("Escola de Samba, Alegria de Viver"). Designed to illustrate the progressive ideas of white middle-class intellectuals, the films show a real reluctance to confront the specifically racial dimension of oppression, to see that racism is not only a kind of salt rubbed into the wounds of class but also a wound in itself. The films of the seventies, as we have seen with *Compasso de Espera* and *Na Boca do Mundo,* dare to pose the question of racism. Rather than subordinate race to class, some of the films articulate the two together. The repression of *candomblé* in *Tent of Miracles,* for example, is intricately linked to political and economic oppression. The black labor-union activist (Milton Gonçalves) martyred in Leon Hirszman's *Eles Não Usam Black Tie* (They Don't Use Black Tie, 1981), is murdered because he is an activist, but his killers also say "Get the black guy" before they shoot.

The most striking change between the sixties and the seventies lies in a changed attitude toward Afro-Brazilian culture generally and Afro-Brazilian religion specifically. The Cinema Novo directors of the early sixties tended to see Afro-Brazilian religion as alienated and marginal, something to be tolerated or reformed by well-meaning leftists. In *The Given Word, camdomblé* is marginal to the mainstream practice of the Catholic Church. In *Barravento,* it is the partial cause of the people's alienation, that which keeps their eyes focused on heaven rather than on oppression here on earth. The attitude in the seventies is quite different. Black culture, once considered marginal, becomes the vital source of the powerful originality of Brazilian culture. Religion, no longer the opium of the people, becomes the scene of struggle and the locus of resistance to imperialist hegemony.

Many Brazilian films evoke political and social conflict through the manipulation of cultural expression, and Afro-Brazilian music is crucial in this regard. *The Given Word,* for example, sets in motion a cultural battle between *berimbau* (an instrument consisting of a long bow, gourd, and string) and church bell, which synecdochically encapsulates the larger struggle of *candomblé* and Catholic Church. *Tent of Miracles* counterpoints opera and samba to metaphorize the larger conflict between Bahia's white elite and its subjugated *mestiços,* between ruling-class science and popular culture. Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (Land in Trance, 1967) uses *candomblé* music to evoke the trance of the title, while inverting its conventional associations to suggest that the truly superstitious, those "in trance," are not the impoverished black practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religion but rather the mystical power-mongers of the white political elite. Rocha also associates the opera of Verdi and Carlos Gomes with the rightist Porfirio Diaz, samba with the populist Vieira, and the music of Villa-Lobos, the erudite elaborator of popular themes, with the anguished and divided protagonist Paulo Martins who, like Villa-Lobos and Rocha himself, gives sophisticated expression to the forces of popular culture.[6]

This circulation of popular and erudite culture is constant in Brazilian cinema. The stories of both *Xica da Silva* and the more

XICA DA SILVA

recent and in some ways similar *Xico Rei* by Walter Lima, Jr. were first presented as samba school "allegories" for Rio's Carnival. Indeed, Carlos Diegues called *Xica* a "samba-enredo" —a film analogous to the collection of songs, dances, costumes, and lyrics that form part of that folk opera called a samba school presentation. The *favelados* of *Ladrões de Cinema* (the title, *Cinema Thieves,* alludes to De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*), meanwhile, steal film-making equipment from American tourists at Rio's Carnival, and conceive the film they plan to make as a kind of samba school narration of a famous episode in Brazilian history. At times, the film-makers' tributes to popular culture are reciprocated in the form of popular-culture hommages to the film-makers. The death of Glauber Rocha, for example, was commemorated in the popular "cord literature" of the Northeast (the same literature which inspired the narrative strategies of both *Black God, White Devil* and *Antonio das Mortes*) in the form of a poem which eulogized him as the "cineaste who gave his life for his country." And a Rio samba school is currently preparing a narrative-musical-dance tribute to Rocha for the 1983 Carnival.

A striking feature that would seem to separate Brazilian from North American culture is the extent to which the former is highly and *consciously* Africanized (I emphasize the "consciously" because North America has not yet become fully aware of the degree to which it too has been changed by the cultural contribution of Afro-Americans). Brazilians do not speak *Portugues,* argues Lelia Gonzales, they speak *Pretogues* (blackoguese) because African sounds and speech rhythms so strongly imbue their speech as to radically differentiate it from continental Portuguese. The most highly prized symbols of Brazilian nationhood are black. The national dish is *feijoada,* soul food created by blacks in the days of slavery. The national music is the samba, whose unmistakably African polyrhythms set all of Brazil dancing. The real Brazil, white, mulatto and black Brazilians will tell you, is in Bahia, the most Afrocentric metropolis in Brazil. Afro-Brazilian religion is now perfectly respectable and even fashionable among the elite. And in the privileged moments of Brazilian life, in carnival, for example, Brazil celebrates its own blackness.

Yet these cultural victories often mask political defeats. The process is clear in *Xica da Silva.* In this historical comedy, the eighteenth-century slave Xica becomes mistress to the richest man on the Brazilian diamond frontier. Although she briefly lives like a fantasy princess, with her own palace and servants, she is ultimately divested of her power. The Afro-Brazilian culture she intermittently embodies wins consistent victories: samba is shown as more vital than European classical music, spicy Afro-Brazilian cuisine overpowers the pallid representative of Portuguese colonialism, and Afro-Brazilian dance and energy far outshine Portuguese cultural expression. (If I was racist, says Carlos Diegues, I was racist with the whites.) Yet the carnivalesque inversions of *Xica da Silva* simultaneously reveal and mask a political and cultural problem. If Brazil's soul is black, its persona is often white. More importantly, the many

homages to Afro-Brazilian culture in the films of the seventies are projected into a social conjuncture in which blacks are excluded from the centers of decision. And *this* situation will change only when the respect currently being accorded to Afro-Brazilian *culture* is matched by a real change in the social situation of Afro-Brazilian *citizens,* a change which would necessarily involve a radical redistribution of that substance vital to the life of any community—political power.

NOTES

1. I would like, first of all, to thank New York University for awarding me the Presidential Fellowship which provided the time and financial support in the Spring of 1981 to do the research for this article.

When I began research into this subject there had been no in-depth analysis of the black presence in Brazilian Cinema. The image of blacks in North American cinema had been explored, first in the pioneering essays of Albert Johnson in the late fifties and later in book-length studies such as Thomas Cripp's *Slow Fade to Black,* Daniel Leab's *From Sambo to Superspade,* and Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks.* In Brazil, a recent issue of *Filme Cultura* (August-October 1982) includes a series of articles and interviews on the subject, with articles by José Carlos Avellar, Ismail Xavier and Jean-Claude Bernardet and interviews with Grande Otelo, José Carlos Burle, Ruth de Souza, Léa Garcia, Carlos Diegues, Antonio Pitanga, Zózimo Balbul, Zezé Motta, Odilon Lopes, and Walter Lima, Jr.

2. A 1976 TV commercial carried a very similar message via a very similar image. An off-screen voice announces: "In the imperial era of Brazil, transport looked like this": the image shows a blonde woman being carried on a litter by two slaves. Then the voice again: "Today, however, it's possible to enjoy the comfort of an LTD Galaxy, thanks to the services of Itaperá." We then see the same blonde woman, in the back seat of a car driven by a black chauffeur. The actor is the same man who played the slave in the previous shot. The slave has become a servant, in a movement paralleling the overall trajectory of *João Negrinho.*

3. Bosley Crowther, in his *New York Times* review of *The Given Word,* gave remarkably inaccurate and ethnocentric accounts of certain scenes. According to Crowther, "A swarm of pagan dancers stage a stomping swirling riot" and "Negroes and Indians come on and crowd the stage with wiggle dancing and the music of drums and guitars." Apart from the fact that there are no guitars in sight, the "wiggle dancing" is usually referred to as "samba," and the bestial "swarm" of Negroes and Indians, who are not in fact so easily distinguishable as Crowther suggests, is simply an ethnically mixed group of Brazilians enjoying themselves in the carnivalesque fashion common in Salvador.

4. See Ismail Xavier, *A Narração Contraditoria,* a thesis presented to the University of São Paulo in 1979.

5. For a detailed analysis of these sequences, and of the film as a whole, see Randal Johnson's "Cinema Novo and Cannibalism: *Macunaíma,*" in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1982).

6. Brazilian films also use Afro-*American* music for ironic commentary. In *Devil Queen,* the Godfather of Soul's "Sex Machine" exhorts the depressed protagonist to "get on up." Earlier in the film, the silky voice of Nat King Cole singing "They Tried to Tell Us We're Too Young" coincides with a gangland encounter of transvestites. In *Tent of Miracles,* a discussion of racial and political oppression in Bahia, we hear Jimmy Cliff singing "I Want to be Free." And in Ana Carolina's *Sea of Roses,* the sounds of Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely" are ironically superimposed on the obnoxious pranks of an adolescent girl.

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Reviews

BLADE RUNNER

Director: Ridley Scott. Producer: Michael Deeley. Screenplay: Hampton Fancher and David Peoples. Photography: Jordan Cronenweth. Production design: Lawrence G. Paull. Music: Vangelis. Warners.

In director Ridley Scott's $30-million noir thriller, *Blade Runner,* set in Los Angeles 36 years from now, sophisticated new robots known as "replicants" have drastically narrowed the gap between humans and machines. Prize creations of the cadaverous, ironic Dr. Eldon Tyrell and his superconglomerate, they not only surpass all people in physical strength and at least match their inventors in intelligence, they also look, sound and feel exactly like real men and women. And they have begun to develop the one element—emotions—whose absence clearly distinguished earlier models from their human twins. Meanwhile, humanity has been doing some gap-closing of its own, for the film's Los Angeles has turned into a festering hell of technological overload and most of its citizens might just as well be robots. In the movie's source, the 1969 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by the late Philip K. Dick, a nuclear firestorm devastated the earth; elite survivors and their descendants then moved to "Off-World" colonies, with replicants as their slaves. *Blade Runner* retains this feature as a background story but never mentions atomic war. Its polluted megalopolis is simply the worst of contemporary LA triple-distilled: earthquake-defying skyscrapers that reek of soullessness and paranoia-inducing secret activities; polyglot Breughel-on-the-River-Styx hordes of punk-Oriental-Krishna-humongous-hustler-lowlifes clustering like heaps of scurrying cockroaches at their bases; air thick and fetid enough to walk on; mural-sized video ads flickering tauntingly from the sides of buildings and the fuselages of drifting blimps—all of it soaked in nearly continuous, doubtless acid-laced drizzle. It's a thronged, crushingly overfreighted world which places every positive quality that the term "humanity" denotes under pressure so cruel and relentless as to threaten the concept with extinction.

As the film begins, four replicants possessing all these qualities have infiltrated this sinkhole illegally: Leon (Brion James), feverish with terror that he will be either killed ("retired") or returned to slavery; the voluptuous, worldly

assassin Zhora (Joanna Cassidy); the waif-punkette "standard pleasure model" Pris (Daryl Hannah), and the group's leader Roy Batty (the Dutch actor Rutger Hauer), an Aryan-looking genius with a taste for poetry, mockery and murder. Wending their way through the nowhere city, they seek their maker Tyrell, who has cunningly limited their life spans to just four years. Along the way, they encounter a cross-section of the mostly debased humans they were built to mimic and to serve —in particular the gnomic, prematurely aging genetic designer J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson), who lives by himself in an otherwise deserted apartment block with walking, talking puppet-toys he has constructed to ease his loneliness. Ordered to hunt and to destroy the replicants is "blade runner" Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford). When Tyrell's aide Rachael (Sean Young) asks him, "Have you ever retired a human by mistake?" he immediately says no but obviously suffers doubts. Which is why he has sunk so deep into the anomie of the classic film noir hero that the barrier between him and his mechanical quarry has become merely a semantic tissue. *Blade Runner* sets out to study the nature of this tissue.

Yet this statement misleads in suggesting a systematic development of story and theme, whereas much of what really interests Ridley Scott seems to lie outside these concerns and amid more elusive matters—mood, tone, texture—for their own sakes. Scott did not take on this project until long after actor-screenwriter Hampton Fancher began adapting Dick's novel and later got producer Michael Deeley (*The Deer Hunter*) involved in financing it. Important contributions to the look of the film were made by Douglas Trumbull, Richard Yuricich, David Dryer, Syd Mead, and director of photography Jordan Cronenweth. Yet Scott's stamp is totally, unmistakably on the film; as its other screenwriter, David Peoples, told Paul M. Sammon of *Cinefantastique* (Vol. 12, No. 5-6), "I can't emphasize enough that Ridley Scott is really the author of *Blade Runner.*" However, the nature of this authorship is not so easy to pin down.

Scott has summed up his approach to moviemaking with a couple of notable comments: "The design is the statement" and "To me, a film is like a 700-layer cake." Thus far, his feature career (*The Duellists, Alien,* and *Blade Runner*) shows a degree of the thematic consistency generally held to be the mark of an auteur. Feraud, the demented Napoleonic officer of *The Duellists* who hounds a colleague year after year over a worked-up slight, renders himself something comparable to the standard idea of a robot: an embittered shell of a human being dead to every feeling except his lunatic obsession. One spaceman in *Alien* turns out to be quite literally a robot, surprising the audience because he has been aping a human being until then as successfully as the replicants in *Blade Runner* do. But the real consistency of the movies is visual: an attraction to intricate, detail-packed images; a fascination with the tonalities of light, especially at dawn, sunset or amid darkness; a predelection for sliding away from the demands of plot and characterization or for prolonging scenes and shots beyond their requirements. Most people probably remember the penumbral lighting of *The Duellists* far longer than the twists of its story, and the spectral-ghastly atmosphere of *Alien* outlingers in memory even its revolting monster. If *The Duellists* resonates with more than just visual virtuosity as an end in itself, that is primarily because of its raw material, Joseph Conrad's "The Duel," and if *Alien* ends up as a dismally empty experience, chalk it up to a brainless, cattle-prodding script which no amount of wizardry could render meaningful. *Alien,* coldly manufactured to be the hit that it became, suggested that Scott might be pretty soulless himself, spreading 700 layers of frosting on gold or garbage equally, without knowing or caring which was which.

Visually, *Blade Runner* continues in this vein, blending redressed standing sets (a street at the Burbank Studios which has appeared in dozens of other movies), actual locations (the spooky-rococo Bradbury Building in downtown Los Angeles, Frank Lloyd Wright's Mayan-influenced Ennis Brown house for Deckard's apartment, a meat-packing vault in Downey for an Oriental eye-maker's lab), matte paintings, floor and post-production effects, complex miniatures, and photography of the deepest noir into the densest, most arresting futuristic society in screen history. The results are vision after vision of a definitive "terrible beauty," both urban and human: the opening sweeps over the tenebrous, phosphorescent

city as it spreads from horizon to horizon and spews rolling fireballs into the twilight; creepy, vertiginous views down skyscraper canyons to arterial streets; the streets close up, pulsating with forests of beings who look human but seem robotic; the death throes of Zhora, which hurl her in slow motion through a succession of plate glass windows, with their flying shards throwing jagged flashes of neon in all directions.

It would be easy to extend this list by citing nearly every other image in the film and just as easy merely to swim in this high-tech slipstream. Or, at the other extreme, one could belittle the whole experience along the lines of Andrew Britton's remark in *Movie 27/28:* "There is no more characteristic feature of the 'seventies Hollywood feature than the invitation to purchase the bankruptcy of American capitalism as the ultimate spectacle." Which, if true of *Blade Runner,* would render it as bankrupt as *Alien.* Certainly, although the word is never spoken in the film, the garish decay which it renders so elaborately is capitalist in origin. But its true concerns lie elsewhere.

Robots with "human" qualities, monsters whose "humanity" shames real humans, more-human-than-human (Tyrell's slogan) creatures and machines have long been fixtures of fantasy and science fiction movies. King Kong, HAL 9000, the otherworldly visitors of *It Came from Outer Space, Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* and *ET—The Extra Terrestrial* all display traits generally held to be "human"—intellect, the capacity for love and other emotional responses, humor, irony, benevolence, consciousness of mortality—while remaining evidently non-human, which basically means without human bodies. Their opposites are beings with such bodies (*I Walked With a Zombie,* both versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) who are not truly human because they have no emotions. So form and feeling, in these and many other movies, are the essential criteria for human-ness. *Blade Runner* mingles the opposites by presenting machines with the full range of "human" emotional powers. As Roy Batty says to J. F. Sebastian, who helped to design him: "We're not computers, we're physical." He proves it amusingly by greeting Pris with a French kiss. When wounded mortally, the replicants do not spray wires, nuts, bolts, or circuits as the robot in *Alien* does; they bleed and thrash and scream like humans, or like humans in movies of recent years. Quite literally nothing differentiates them from humans, except that they were not born of human eggs and sperm. And during their struggle to gain more life, their "human" traits flower—and, in the case of Roy Batty, touch grandeur.

Scott and the actors work out this motif with a distinctive series of fresh details for each character. Mole-faced, squinting Leon's jumpy interruptions of the sleekly condescending blade runner who interrogates him in the first scene (before we know who either of them is) echo through the subsequent scenes leading up to his death, as Deckard constantly replays them on tape and marvels at such irreducible eccentricity and such genuine terror issuing from an android. But when the two finally meet in combat, Brion James makes Leon's sudden metamorphosis into a lion brutally comic, as he slaps, pounds and throttles the same actor who played superhero Indiana Jones into the middle of next week as though Deckard were just a beefcake ragdoll. Yet Leon's taunting question ("Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it?") reverberates with a passion for life that Deckard, even with his life at stake, cannot quite reach (as he well knows). Joanna Cassidy gives Zhora a rich sense of sexy, worldweary amusement and ruefulness, and Daryl Hannah (a gymnast as well as an actress) colors Pris's little-girl-lostness with sudden spurts of graceful movement and oddly illuminating behavior: approaching J. F. Sebastian as he sleeps and sniffing him or jogging with eerie, poetic relaxation away from the camera before launching her final, lethal assault on Deckard. Each has her signature line, too—Zhora's quiet "No, I wouldn't" in response to Deckard's banter about how surprised she would be to learn the lengths men will go to in order to see a beautiful female body; Pris's soft, poignant "Then we're stupid, and we'll die" after Roy outlines their predicament. And they have their death scenes—Pris, shot in mid-tumble by Deckard, shrieks and pounds shockingly, spellbindingly, as the life force tears itself out of her—as the ultimate signs of their "humanity." Along with J. F. Sebastian, whose "accelerated decrepitude" forces him to share half of their plight, and

his Geppetto-like menagerie of toys (Scott might make a fine Dickens adaptor), these "machines" (by now quotation marks are mandatory for this word also) do what movies at their finest have always had a special ability to do: give us an immediate, sensual feeling for the beautiful diversity which humanity at its finest can achieve.

This holds true even though the movie cannot have what it really needs: actual robots playing the replicants and evoking these same responses from us. As it now stands, we can always fall back on the inescapable fact that these robot characters are really human actors, many reassuringly familiar from other movies like *Turkish Delight* (Hauer), *The Late Show* (Cameron), and *Summer Lovers* (Hannah). Robot characters like Robby in *Forbidden Planet,* Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back,* and *ET* have won affection from millions, but this is often a cozy, campy affection not nearly comparable to an android striking us as poignantly, ironically, headily, contradictorally as an actor can. Which is reassuring (isn't it?), even if it does prevent *Blade Runner* from becoming as disturbing as it conceivably could be.

On a parallel track, Deckard is initially even less "human" than the replicants are, and arguably he remains so even at the end, though Scott may not have planned it that way. Deckard's Raymond Chandleresque narration tells us that, before the movie begins, he abandoned replicant-hunting as a profession because the machines he was assigned to destroy were becoming so much more lifelike all the time that he could no longer hide behind the euphemism "retirement." Harrison Ford fits the part almost perfectly because there is often something faintly zombie-like about him on the screen, an aura of deep-down detachment from what he is doing, which he first employed as the enigmatic corporate front man in *The Conversation* and which rises to the surface even when he does dreamboat romantic roles (the unintentionally hilarious *Hanover Street*), square old Us vs. the Nazi Scum numbers (*Force 10 from Navarone*), and perpetual-motion kiddie matinee heroics (the *Star Wars* movies and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). This time, as in *The Conversation* (where his role is just a cameo), he actively uses this quality for its overtones of thick, stunted apathy and strives—in concert with the film's deliberate, often glutinous pacing—to convey a palpable sense of a benumbed life force struggling to regain vigor in a poisoned world. And Ford abets the movie's consideration of the human/machine dichotomy by setting himself up, film-noir style, as the first half of a parallel dichotomy—hero/villain—then blurring it out of existence.

But the movie and the performance are at least half-failures for more than just the impossible-to-rectify reason already mentioned. Vangelis (of *Chariots of Fire*) has blessed *Blade Runner* with a fine, anthem-like electronic score which shifts (sometimes a little jarringly) to a sort of 2-AM-in-the-cocktail-lounge bluesiness for Deckard's moments of alcoholic introspection in his bat-cave of an apartment. But, like the images, it sometimes must compete with the narration, which is often grotesquely awful in its strainings after Chandler-like rough diamonds of knight-in-the-sewer wisdom. Thus, Deckard cannot just say that he gave up blade running because annihilating replicants disturbed him; he must mumble that he "had a bellyful of killing." So that the popcorn munchers in the audience will realize for sure that he is Mr. Good Guy (even though everything in the movie works against this simple label), he must describe his sleazy boss as "the kind of man that called black men niggers." (What black men? There aren't any in the picture, even in the crowd scenes.) When nailing down the similarity between himself and the replicants by stating that neither were supposed to have feelings, he must add, "What the hell was happening to me?" And his ex-post-facto explanation of Roy Batty's motivation for saving his life during their climactic confrontation, though better written than these examples, nearly kills the poetic resonance of the scene by oververbalizing what is already visually clear. Unconfirmed rumors have it that most of this gunk was plastered onto the film's sound track just before its nationwide première last June, following some problems at previews. Scott (who is also said to have been removed from the film during post-production) has denied this, claiming that narration was always planned for the movie but that the precise amounts and placements of it were fluid. Whatever the case, Ford's indifferent, sometimes contempt-tinged readings of most of these lines only makes them all

the more embarrassing. But even if they were better-written, the Chandler "tradition," especially after *The Long Goodbye* and *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid,* is probably a dead letter for contemporary moviemakers, though loads of them (and lots of mystery writers, too) do not seem to have gotten the message yet. The imagery and the conventions of film noir may be nearing a comparable cul-de-sac. Most assuredly, *Blade Runner* is the most overwhelming example in years of the power that they can still generate. But it does not reimagine them enough to break into new territory.

In addition to his murderous encounters with the replicants, Deckard's relationship with Rachael is meant to be his road back to human responsiveness, but similar difficulties with writing, acting and visual style plague this stratum of the movie also. Take her first entrance from the chiaroscuro of Tyrell's Xanadu-like receiving chamber: a weird amalgam of neo-forties haute couture glaze (bunned hair, black silk sheath with Mommie Dearest shoulder pads, wine-tinted fingernails that glow as dust-flecked sunlight streams through them) and callow recessiveness thinly veneered with brittle hauteur. Right away, Deckard discovers that she is a replicant herself without knowing it, Tyrell having endowed her with "memories" of a childhood that actually belongs to his niece (who, oddly, never appears). Later, in an effort to deny the truth, she shows him a photograph of her as a little girl with her mother, but he harshly exposes it as a fake. Yet the false photo and the false memory—recurring elements in the linkage of Deckard and the replicants—penetrate his anomie. For his own apartment is full of photographs that are "false memories" in a different sense: images of people and scenes mounted on his piano, some perhaps of his actual yesterdays (he has an ex-wife who calls him "sushi . . . cold fish," he claims, but we never see her in person, nor is it clear that she is visible in these photographs), but others, some so old as to be virtual daguerrotypes, of people he obviously could never have known. Scott does not really develop this memory/photograph theme to its fullest, though in a *Blow-up*-like scene Deckard uses an Esper machine to find imagery in one of Leon's similar photos that is invisible to the naked eye. But he does give Rachael a photographic

Pris (Daryl Hannah) and Batty (Rutger Hauer) as replicants in BLADE RUNNER

style of her own. Repeatedly shooting Sean Young in lengthy, brown-toned, velvetty close-ups, he makes us study Rachael's tremors of emotional dawning as they ripple over the surface of her cosmeticized face; it is his most delicate embodiment of frail humanity struggling for re-emergence, which is also how Deckard comes to view it. After she rescues him by shooting Leon, she plays his piano tentatively while he sleeps, and he awakens to whisper, "I dreamed music." "I remember lessons," she murmurs, "but I didn't know whether it was me or Tyrell's niece." Her uncertainty is the fragility of everything in the lost past of every person, all the forgotten things that never become catalysts for recollection, all the memories either distorted or altogether false. Rachael's half-open, half-afraid stare at Deckard after he tells her, "You play beautifully," then moves to kiss her, is Sean Young's most moving moment in the film.

However, she does tend to wilt somewhat under all the cinematic pressure that the director puts on her with his Von Sternbergian lighting posings; her screen persona (judging also from *Stripes* and *Young Doctors in Love,* though both are featherweight comedies) is oddly complementary to Ford's in its nougat-soft dreaminess. But even if she were more electrifying or perhaps older and more experienced as an actress, Rachael would remain too vague a character. Just as Scott and the writers fail to cover Deckard's Chandleresque lingo by making it a feature of a "fake" past which he has chosen to adopt, they also miss connecting Rachael's odd manner and garb to her

Deckard (Harrison Ford) and Rachael (Sean Young) in BLADE RUNNER

implanted memories. It's as though Scott simply splurged on these touches without caring if they had resonant meaning. And it is needlessly unclear why Rachael is so emotionally virgin. Even if Tyrell has kept her under close surveillance in his pyramid, hasn't she, being so close to flesh and blood, felt stirrings of flesh and blood feelings and tried to act on them? She never becomes as vivid as the other replicants. And the ending, her escape from Los Angeles with Deckard (another reported last-minute change, pasted together out of what are said to be aerial outtakes from *The Shining*), when his narration suddenly reveals that she is not programmed to die in four years like the other replicants, finishes off whatever poignance still remains in her situation.

Despite all this, *Blade Runner* achieves a dazzling stretch of power just prior to this unfortunate conclusion, mainly thanks to Roy Batty. Rutger Hauer makes him alternatively campy, eloquent and lethal, mixing his qualities until we almost forget that we are dealing with an android. When he finally faces Tyrell and demands "more life, fucker," then displays his mental prowess by desperately suggesting genetic solutions to his terminal flaw, only to have Tyrell dismiss them all, his Aryan menace (frequently displayed through low angles which place him against the cosmos for a backdrop) takes on real stature. His murder of Tyrell—with the camera concentrating on his contorted face as he releases his passionate despair—is a climax of nothing less than Shakespearean horror and majesty: by crushing the life out of Tyrell, the only one who could possibly extend his own (conceivably all the way to immortality), Roy is, in effect, killing God and committing suicide simultaneously. After mockingly chasing Deckard through the Bradbury Building (the film's final destruction of the hero/villain dichotomy), then saving him from sure death, he awaits his own. As his machine-made pulse fades, he looks softly at the prostrate Deckard and muses, "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe . . . Attack ships on fire off the shoulders of Orion . . ." Then, noticing the rain moistening his face, he formulates the mataphor: "All these things will be lost in time . . . like tears . . . in rain . . ." The movie brilliantly turns the obviousness of this final comparison to its advantage by highlighting, through Hauer's hesitant tone and his faraway stare, Roy's need to say it explicitly before he dies, as a final expression of his best sensibility. As his hands atrophy and release a pigeon he has been holding into the sky (in a kind of stop motion), the distinction between human and machine no longer has any real meaning.

Thus, *Blade Runner* shades into a meditation on the transience of not so much life as existence, the existence of *everything,* animate and inanimate. These two categories, like human/machine and hero/villain, also break down, until both have equal weight and value. This is the ultimate significance of Scott's frame-packing style. It explains why many of the film's most incidental-seeming vignettes—a harp-scored tracking movement away from Roy and Leon slantwise across a street where cooking fires flicker and a line of bicyclists pedals towards and past the camera, mangy street urchins exulting in the muck over the theft of a hubcap from Deckard's car, lingered-over shots of plumaged showgirls backstage at a dive—are so eerily stirring. Whether or not Scott has formulated anything like this notion in his mind (he is given to calling entertainment his only directorial goal), he has made it real, however imperfectly. *Blade Runner* is a crippled but nonetheless magnificent edifice of a film and, during this sad period for Hollywood moviemaking, damned near to an outright miracle.

—MICHAEL DEMPSEY

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP

Director: George Roy Hill. Script: Steve Tesich, based on the novel by John Irving. Photography: Miroslav Ondricek. Warners.

John Irving, author of the novels *The World According to Garp* and *Hotel New Hampshire:* for integrating feminism as a major philosophical theme; for writing about rape with its true horror and brutality; for creating male characters who care about kids; and for understanding that feminist excesses are funny. —"*Ms.* Heroes," *Ms.* (August, 1982)

The World According to Garp is a remarkable achievement. Steve Tesich and George Roy Hill have succeeded in transforming John Irving's powerful, darkly comic "feminist" novel into an insipid, safe and sentimental "masculine" film. Something indeed has been lost in the change of medium: the message. Lust, rape, new relationships between men and women, new definitions of fatherhood and manhood—these are the issues in Irving's *Garp*. All changed or omitted in the film. Tesich, its screenwriter, and Hill, the director, have taken a novel which presents a world of characters significantly altered by the ideas of the women's movement and have magically returned both the themes and the characters to their safe, traditional places. They have made Irving's *The World According to Garp* into a man's world after all.

Ms. praised Irving "for writing about rape with its true terror and brutality." Rape is indeed a central issue in Irving's *Garp*. The film virtually omits it. The novel explores the issue in two powerful and unforgettable scenes. While running in the park Garp finds a ten-year-old who has just been raped. His response is to break down crying: "The sky was grey, dead leaves were all around them, and when Garp began to wail aloud, the girl picked up his T-shirt and covered herself with it."[1] Garp's initial sorrow gives way to outrage as he wildly searches the park to find and capture the rapist. The second scene is in the first chapter of Garp's novel *The World According to Bensenhaver*. This chapter is a powerful, detailed description of the terrifying rape of Hope Standish who manages heroically to slash the rapist to death with his own knife. The significant point about this novel within the novel is that Irving tells it from the woman's point of view, making it perfectly clear that rape is nothing but a brutal violation of a human being, that Hope Standish has the right to defend herself to the death, the rapist's death.

These two scenes present rape in its "true terror and brutality." But they are also important because they demonstrate Garp's new awareness of the meaning of rape. He understands it from a woman's rather than the usual male point of view. In a central passage in the novel, Garp reflects on the significance of rape:

> I feel uneasy, Garp wrote, that my life has come in contact with so many rapes. Apparently, he was referring to the ten-year-old in the city park, to the eleven-year-old Ellen James and her terrible society —his mother's wounded women with their symbolic, self-inflicted speechlessness. And later he would write a novel, which would make Garp more of a "household product," which would have much to do with rape. Perhaps rape's offensiveness to Garp was that it was an act that disgusted him with himself—with his own very male instincts, which were otherwise so unassailable. He never felt like raping anyone; but rape, Garp thought, made men feel guilt by association (p. 209).

In *The World According to Garp* a new male consciousness emerges. Garp's response to rape is self-disgust and guilt.

Shockingly the film omits all of this. No child in the park, no Bensenhaver story, no Garp anguishing about rape. The film makes one feeble gesture at confronting the issue when Garp studies for a few moments a picture of Ellen James and listens to the story of her rape. He does react briefly with some feelings of pity, but quickly shifts his attention to attacking the Ellen Jamesians for their extremism. The film nowhere presents rape in its "true terror and brutality." This omission is unforgivable. Either Tesich and Hill don't believe that rape is a serious issue in the novel, which reveals a strange misreading, or they wanted to avoid offensive subject matter in a safe commercial product.

Besides avoiding the unsettling issue of rape, the film-makers also violate the novel by translating the liberated characters of Garp, Helen, and Jenny back into safe traditional stereotypes. A few gestures towards feminism exist. Jenny, the feminist leader, and Roberta Muldoon, the transsexual, two extreme and usually ridiculed types, are sympathetically

1. John Irving, *The World According to Garp* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), p. 199. All citations are from this edition.

Robin Williams as Garp, Mary Beth Hurt as Helen

treated, but in safe and superficial ways.

Robin Williams's Garp is the film's biggest weakness. True, his Garp is a happy househusband, home fixing meals and playing cute games with his kids, while Helen is off teaching. But these are superficial role changes. Wearing apron strings does not represent a significant change in attitude and awareness. Garp, outraged at rape, anguishing over male lust, sympathetic to the exploitation of women? Forget it. Nothing like that is in the film. Irving's Garp is the "new" man, the man who has a new awareness about women. Garp is one of the few heroes in American literature to show such empathy with women, to engage in rethinking male-female relationships. Not only is he outraged by rape, but he is deeply disturbed by male lust. He anguishes over his seduction of babysitters. He does not exult in his macho power, but instead is confused and ashamed by it. After the last babysitter seduction he reflects on why he doesn't want to have a daughter: "Garp didn't want a daughter because of *men*. Because of *bad* men certainly; but even, he thought, because of men like me" (p. 212). The film shows nothing of this complexity of feeling. Garp's seduction of the babysitter is treated as a typical male indiscretion which has little significance to him and which he soon forgets. There is no sign of an intense conscience at work, but rather, in Williams's treatment, a little boy's naughtiness.

Garp's reaction to Helen's affair with Michael Milton dramatically shows the film's recasting of Garp into the old male role. Williams plays the betrayed, cuckolded husband to the hilt. The happy family world according to Williams's Garp is utterly destroyed by Helen's horrendous act of infidelity. No sexual equality here. No remembrance of the babysitter. Just pure simple male outrage. Later, while the family convalesces at Dog's Head Harbor after the tragic accident, Williams delivers a splendid outburst of male self-righteous anger, slamming the piano shut as Helen is playing. How wonderfully ironic this incident is, revealing once again the laughable fragility of the male ego. And how unlike Irving's Garp. Not only does Irving's Garp try to understand his own lust, he also struggles to believe in the equality of infidelity. In the

novel, Garp is hurt and angered when he finds out about Milton. He does react like a typical male. But the crucial difference is that he goes beyond those feelings. In a key moment Garp reflects:

> He was at the point in his feelings toward Helen where he felt betrayed but at the same time honestly loved and important to her; he had not had time enough to ponder *how* betrayed he felt—or how much, truly, she had been trying to keep him in her mind. It was a delicate point, between hating her and loving her terribly—also he was not without sympathy for whatever she wanted; after all, he knew, the shoe on the other foot had also been worn (and was certainly thinner). It even seemed unfair, to Garp, that Helen, who had also meant so well, had been caught like this; she was a good woman and she certainly deserved better luck (p. 371).

Garp here struggles to keep the affair in perspective and demonstrates a complexity of feeling and sympathy for Helen's point of view that is totally absent in the film.

Williams's Garp is vintage traditional male. The film-makers so misunderstand Irving's point that Garp is the new male that they leave the most telling presentation of Garp's new sensibilities entirely out of the film. In the novel, Garp goes to his mother's funeral, the first "feminist" funeral, in drag because no men are allowed. Garp is a marvelous comic figure decked out as a sexy queen with blond wig, cherry-red boots and huge breasts. When he is discovered by Pooh and chased out of the auditorium, he escapes in a cab. The cabby, thinking Garp is a woman, begins spouting male clichés about Sally Devlin, a candidate for governor who has just spoken at Jenny's funeral. The cabby gives the old male put-down of Ms. Devlin because she had cried during her speech: "'She looked like a real idiot to me,' the cabby said. 'She couldn't be no governor if she couldn't control herself no better than that.'" (p. 504). Here Garp reveals his sensibilities. First he feels ashamed that the cabby is such an ignorant man. Then he gets angry when the man keeps on. In a wonderfully comic but profound moment, Garp actually becomes what the cabby thinks he is: a woman. He says to the cabby: "'You're an asshole and a moron . . . and if you don't drive me to the airport with your mouth shut, I'll tell a cop you tried to paw me all over'" (p. 504). When the cabby cusses him out, "Fucking *women,*" Garp responds, "Fucking *men.*" Here's Garp at his funniest but finest moment: he understands and identifies with women's experience and is outraged at the male abuse that women experience every day. Why is this scene omitted in the film? The answer is obvious: nothing in the film remotely suggests that Garp is capable of such insight. Williams's Garp is just a good old boy.

As if to make up for so much that they leave out, the film-makers overload one aspect of Garp—Garp as father. But once again they have betrayed Irving and transformed Garp as the new father into Garp as the traditional gushy family man. Garp in the novel is deeply involved in the daily lives of his children. He is obsessed by their vulnerability and has an acute awareness of life's tragic possibilities, the omnipresent threat of the "Under Toad." He is a neurotic, anxious father who desperately wants to protect his family from the brutality of the world. This desire drives Garp into wonderfully bizarre and comic behavior: chasing speeding cars in the neighborhood; his hilarious trip in the middle of the night to Mrs. Ralph's house to get Duncan; and his marvelous, zany story "Dog in the Alley"—all to warn Walt about running in the street.

But Garp as sensitive, comic, concerned father has a darkly ironic side, too. His very concern to protect his children leads him into such excesses that he helps produce the very disasters he tries to avoid. Garp himself is aware of this irony:

> There was so much to worry about, when worrying about children, and Garp worried so much about everything: at times, especially in these throes of insomnia, Garp thought himself to be psychologically unfit for parenthood. Then he worried about that, too, and felt all the more anxious for his children. What if their most dangerous enemy turned out to be *him*? (p. 275)

The film reduces this complex vision of the ironies of fatherhood to Williams's sentimental desire to look at his "beautiful" children while they're sleeping and to luxuriate in the grand pleasures of being a father. No fear, no anxiety, no irony to disturb the traditional happy family man.

If the film's Garp is a disappointing misreading of the novel, Helen's transformation is downright offensive. Irving's Helen is a liberated woman. She is a beautiful, brilliant (she received her Ph.D. in English at 23) professor of English, a sophisticated, self-assured woman, who from her first appearance in the novel, reading in the wrestling room, knows

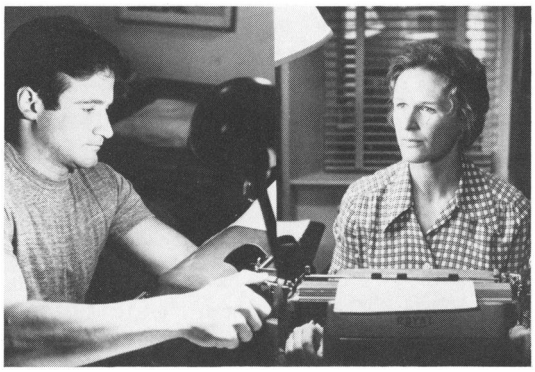
who she is. She is strongly independent, especially in her relationship to Garp. Mary Beth Hurt's Helen captures all the clichés of the bookworm; Helen becomes a sweet, passive, sexless little girl who has no identity except as Garp's wife and who might pass for a stereotypic kindergarten teacher. Two incidents demonstrate how clearly Hollywood has put Helen back into her proper feminine role. The first scene is when Garp is courting Helen. He performs a Mork-like routine for her as she is reading in the bleachers. After enthralling her with his performance, Garp begins to talk about James Joyce. Remember that Helen is supposedly the intellectual specializing in literature. Yet the scene shows them walking off together with Garp lecturing her on some esoteric point about Joyce's singing career. This scene, of course, isn't in the novel at all. Written especially for the film, it is the old male-female scenario: the dominant male lecturing the passive, approving female. She's the expert, but he knows more and she loves it.

The second example of the transformation of Helen is her response to Garp's first important short story. The scene shows them in the bleachers, Helen reading his manuscript while Garp anxiously waits for her verdict. She finishes the story and calls Garp over. She clutches the manuscript to her bosom dramatically declaring that the story makes her sad, so sad. Garp is ecstatic, as Helen lavishes extravagant praise on her adored hero. Helen is awed by Garp's achievement and gives him uncritical, loving, female praise. But Irving's Helen never gives Garp such adolescent adoration. In fact she is highly critical of his early efforts at writing and always takes a sophisticated ironic stance towards his work. Her intellectually demanding attitude goads Garp into becoming a serious writer. After he shows her his first story, instead of gushing praise, Helen writes him the following letter: "Dear Garp, This story shows promise, although I do think at this point, you are more of a wrestler than a writer. There is a care taken with language, and a feeling for people, but the situation seems rather contrived and the ending of this story is pretty juvenile" (p. 93). Irving's Garp relates to Helen as his superior when it comes to critical judgment about literature, and he readily accepts her harsh criticism. Even when he writes his first good story, "The Pension Grillparzer," Helen is not lavish with praise. She tells him, quite reasonably, that it is a pretty good story for a start. She is never easily impressed or awed by Garp at any stage of their relationship (unlike Hurt's Helen, she never goes to any of Garp's wrestling matches). She is not dependent on him for her selfhood and doesn't find her identity in being the writer's supportive wife. Theirs is a relationship of equals and it would be unthinkable for Helen to act like a member of Garp's fan club.

Jenny Fields is the sexual suspect transformed into lovable mother—the perfect Hollywood feminist. Nothing threatening or offensive about this Jenny. The film, of course, omits the most important incident that establishes her radical character in the novel—the opening scene in which she slashes a soldier in a movie theater when he jams his hand up her dress. That is a crucial scene because Jenny's act of self-defense is met with stereotypic male responses. The soldier who assaulted her, the police, even her family, accuse her of wrong-doing. Once again the woman victim of sexual assault becomes the criminal. Jenny has no right to defend herself since they all accuse her of "asking for it." She rejects such accusations and asserts her right to protect herself. This scene cannot be logically omitted—in it she asserts her right to independent reality separate from, and if need be, against the male world. Jenny's bizarre method of conceiving Garp is only the comic embodiment of her revolutionary assertion that she doesn't need relationships with men to give her life meaning. In her key reflection on this issue Jenny realizes: 'In this dirty-minded world . . . you are either somebody's wife or somebody's whore—or fast on your way to becoming one or the other. If you don't fit either category, then everyone tries to make you think there is something wrong with you. But . . . there is nothing wrong with me" (p. 13).

In the film, Jenny is a cardboard feminist, a lovable, eccentric woman whom we mostly see either looking prim and virtuous at those quaint feminist rallies or playing protective mother to Garp. Why would any man want to assassinate this woman?

The film reveals its conventional attitudes not only by omitting potentially disturbing



Mother and son writing team: Robin Williams and Glenn Close

scenes such as those involving rape and Garp's sympathetic identification with women, but it adds a major "normalizing" theme that isn't in the novel at all: Garp's obsession with his flying father, Technical Sergeant Garp. Early in the film is the cute animated scene of young Garp flying with his father, and he becomes a wrestler because the headgear reminds him of a flyer's helmet. In the roof scene he also imitates his tail-gunner father. The car accident happens because Garp is "flying" his car. His final helicopter ride is the culmination of this obsessive flying theme. Even the goofy baby at the beginning and end is "flying."

With unintentional irony, the film-makers create a dominant father figure for Garp in direct contradiction to the novel's view that Jenny and her son can get along perfectly well without one. In the novel, T. S. Garp is a "one-shot" man: he does his job and is never heard from again. Garp never misses, nor even thinks about his father. In fact, what is most radical about the world according to Jenny is that it is a fatherless world, which she and Garp experience not as loss, but as freedom. But Hollywood isn't ready to sell a fatherless world; so Garp gets a father after all.

Irving's *The World According to Garp* is not a simple feminist tract. As *Ms.* magazine suggests, Irving integrates feminism into a serious reflection on the nature of the world. That world is a darkly comic world: "In the world according to Garp, an evening could be hilarious and the next morning could be murderous" (p. 565). Garp articulates this tragic-comic view of the world in a letter to Mrs. Poole who criticized Garp's fiction for precisely its bizarre mixture of the tragic and comic:

> Horace Walpole once said that the world is comic to those who think and tragic to those who feel. I hope you'd agree with me that Walpole somewhat simplifies the world by saying this. Surely both of us think and feel; in regard to what's comic and what's tragic, Mrs. Poole, the world is all mixed up. For this reason I have never understood why "serious" and "funny" are thought to be opposites. It is simply a truthful contradiction that people's problems are often funny and that people are often nonetheless sad (p. 233).

Irving presents us with a "serious funny" world—a world of Garp's hilarious conception, a little girl's rape, Garp's sniffing an old man's crotch in the park, Jenny's and Garp's assassinations, the transsexual Robert Muldoon's throwing a body block on a male chauvinist pig, Michael Milton's paradise lost. He confronts us with a darkly tragic view of the brutality and violence that dominate the world —a world in which "we are all terminal cases." But he also offers a way of coping with that world—humor. Garp says it for Irving in his letter to Mrs. Poole: "I take people very seriously. People are all I take seriously, in fact. Therefore, I have nothing but sympathy for how people behave—and nothing but laughter to console them with" (p. 233).

John Irving gives us a vision of a world in which women and men are in a serious funny struggle to be free from the old oppressive sexual roles and definitions. The world according to Irving is a dark, frightening place, but he has written a wonderfully comic book of consolation.[2]

2. Pauline Kael, in her review of the film (*The New Yorker,* August 23, 1982), sees the novel and film, a "generally faithful adaptation" of the book, as neither feminist nor serious. She calls the novel a "poison-pen letter to Mother and the feminist movement" primarily because of the portrayal of Jenny as an "inhuman drillmaster mother" and the Ellen Jamesians as "a hideous and deformed political group." She criticizes Irving for writing a cunning but sensationalistic story, a "masochistic gifted-victim game that has been played in recent American writing on just about every conceivable level." She wonders why *Ms.* magazine could praise Irving as a hero when, in her opinion, "there's no feeling of truth in either the book or the movie."

While I share many of Ms. Kael's criticisms of the film, I disagree with her contentions that the novel is anti-feminist and lacks a "feeling of truth." Aside from her comments about Jenny and the Ellen Jamesians—with which I can, in part, agree —she does not address the primary feminist issues in the novel which are, as I have suggested, the centrality of rape, the character of Garp as the new man, and Garp as father. She also misses the comic spirit of the novel, seeing Garp's world only as a tragic world of mutilation and castration. But just as the novel is tragic, it is equally comic. *Garp* is a serious *and* funny book true to at least my "feeling of truth" about the tragicomic nature of the world. The world according to Irving does frighten me, but his wonderful laughter also consoles me. Perhaps had Ms. Kael seen both aspects of the novel she would have found some "feeling of truth" in it.

The world according to Tesich and Hill offers no such vision. The film gives only cute, slap-stick heroes and sentimental consolation. It can do nothing more because it does not seriously confront the tragic dimensions of life. No confrontation with rape, no serious presentation of the terrifying aspect of existence. The ending is a perfect Hollywood ending. Garp's tragic assassination by Ellen Jamesian Pooh Percy in the wrestling room is transformed into an upbeat finale. Garp is whisked away by a helicopter and in a marvelous, triumphant ending, looks out the window and cheerily exclaims to his heartbroken wife: "I'm flying, I'm flying." And if such an apotheosis were not enough—the closing shot cuts to the adorable floating baby for a last wonderful ooh and ah!

Congratulations to Tesich, Hill, and the others responsible for this film. They have performed a remarkable feat: they have emasculated a feminist novel.

—JOHN T. HARTZOG

ZOOT SUIT

Director: Luis Valdez. Script: Louis Valdez, based on his stage musical. Photography: Music: Daniel Valdez. Universal.

The character of El Pachuco, the star of the musical *Zoot Suit,* may be as powerful—and as limiting—a cultural image among Chicanos as the man's man that John Wayne came to symbolize in Anglo culture. With a punchy style that smartly matches his own, the musical introduces him to a wider audience—or it would, if distribution restrictions didn't make it a catch-as-catch-can item at local theaters.

The movie tells the story of an infamous trial—the Sleepy Lagoon case in Los Angeles, 1942. Twenty-two young "zoot suiters"—*pachucos,* gang members who talked in an arcane street slang and dressed in elaborate costumes—were summarily arrested after an unexplainable murder in East LA. Twelve of them were sentenced to San Quentin before being released on appeal.

It was widely thought their real crime was being poor, spunky and Mexican-American (or Chicano, as we would say now) at a jingoistic moment in our national history. *Zoot Suit* doesn't dispute that interpretation.

But this isn't soap opera or agitprop. A didactic film might ask, "What did WASP justice do to *pachuco* leader Henry Reyna?" (Reyna is a composite of several of the major figures in the case.) A made-for-TV film might ask, "Who *did* murder the Chicano in Sleepy Lagoon?" *Zoot Suit* asks, "How did Reyna's culture both sustain and sabotage him?"

To answer that question, writer-director Luis Valdez—founder of El Teatro Compesino and creator of the stage play *Zoot Suit*—created El Pachuco (played on screen, as on stage, by Edward James Olmos). El Pachuco is the image of the warrior-male, a walking code of macho attitudes that both protect and imprison. (Valdez's life work in theater has been marked by the bold use of symbols and stereotypes that are given an ironic twist.)

El Pachuco is more than a character; with a snap of his fingers he controls the very editing of the film. But he also occupies a central role in the story. He is Reyna's shadow. He appears in elegant dress, a macho superego, invisible to all but Henry (played by Daniel Valdez, Luis's brother). He urges Henry to defend himself and his girlfriend when threatened—but also to commit murder and rape. He gives Henry the fighting spirit to survive jail, but also urges him to refuse the aid of a leftist organizer (Tyne Daly—in real life Alice Greenfield, who still works for social justice in southern California). He is the dapper, menacing street-fighting man and also the steely man of principle who cannot be broken by third degree or public humiliation.

El Pachuco intimidates Henry. He lounges on a door jamb, contemptuously regarding Henry; he languidly pulls on a joint while jeering at Henry from the back seat of a car. He inspires the beaten young man by rising up before him in an Aztec loincloth.* He sets the social tone, singing and playing "Marijuana Boogie" at a neon-lit piano, accompanied by a Satanic trio of *pachuca* "girl singers." The interplay between them—and Henry offers resistance as well as respect—offers the best and worst of male kindness and cruelty, self-

*This scene was reportedly far more electrifying in the stage version, when El Pachuco rises from humiliation (his beating by the police) in the triumphant garb of the plumed serpent of the Aztecs. Here, as in other aspects of the adaptation, the film de-emphasizes the mythic side of the original work in favor of a more realistic, psychological mode.

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Edward James Olmos as El Pachuco in Zoot Suit

possession and self-absorption.

In this man's universe the women courageously work within El Pachuco's stern limits. Some, the *pachucas,* are as caught up in the romance of being tough as their boyfriends. Others play a madonna role that is the flip side of the bad girl. And when sparks—both cultural and sexual—fly between Henry and Alice the organizer, they also light up the way that *macho* sex roles confine both men and women.

It's a hefty job, to explain the ideology of *machismo,* but El Pachuco has too much style to let you feel it. No sooner has he made his point than, with a lordly flip of the hand, he dismisses its importance. After all, his gesture says, style is everything. Naive aspiration—Henry's desire to join the Navy, for instance—is uncool. Better, when the deck is so sharply stacked, to be cynical.

In his double-edged glory, El Pachuco is the source of the film's strength and its con-

ZOOT SUIT: *El Pachuco has watched as Henry Reynal is beaten during the brawl at Sleepy Lagoon*

troversy. But *Zoot Suit* does more than offer this central symbolic device. It also delivers the savor and snap of pachucismo, so that not only its survival value but the joy, the wit, the cockiness of this pop subculture comes through.

There's the music, composed by Daniel Valdez, taking its cue from the period popularity of Latin musicians like Tito Puente and Lalo Guerrero, and singers like the Hermanas Padilla (Latin analogues to the Andrews sisters). There's the dancing, period authentic and performed to show that these were real people—girls and boys in love and on the town—not *All That Jazzy* automatons or professional body parts.

And then there's the critical item—language. The film uses small doses of *pachuco* slang, often unintelligible to later generations of Chicanos, much less to Puerto Ricans or to Anglos. This special argot creates a special world. It is an outsiders' technique to transform themselves into insiders. If you don't understand the words—they sprinkle the first part of the film—you understand their logic.

The production is as full of wit and punch as any of its zoot suiters is. The transfer from play to screen is more than a translation of convenience. It is a transformation, one that capitalizes precisely on the limits that film, with its capacity for naturalism, is supposed to be able to transcend. The film's use of hypertheatricality goes beyond the mechanics of many musicals; it has a built-in reason to be.

Some of the choice of technique, of course, was dictated by money. This is a bargain-basement—$2.5 million—movie. Universal's original plan for the item that studio executive Ned Tanen thought could break into "the Hispanic market" was simply to videotape an evening's performance of the stage play. Luis Valdez held out for a bigger budget and a real, if bare-bones, film.

But the look of the film—in which the wide-screen intimacy of a love scene alternates with a proscenium-arch-framed dance number before the camera pans over the audience—has to do with the concept of the production. The film jokes about art and reality, and about the importance of artifice in life. When El Pachuco snaps his fingers and changes a scene, there is no staginess about it, only all the zingy artifice of the *pachuco* style.

Wild juxtapositions and mordant visual humor result from abandoning naturalist constraints, and from mixing styles. For instance, a band of GIs walks through the set, all with rifles except for the eager new Chicano recruit, wielding a giant switchblade. Stage flats become object lessons—a backdrop is part judicial facade and part a newspaper headline, commenting succinctly on the press-shaping of public opinion. The merging of drama and musical makes macabre sense. When the young men on trial must rise when their names are mentioned, they act out a tragicomic merry-go-round.

Zoot Suit became a phenomenon in Los Angeles, where it started out as a stage play. The rapport between actors and an audience composed in part of *pachucos*-turned-grown-ups and in part of *pachucos'* children became famous.

"We used to have *pachuco* 'confessionals' after the show," Daniel Valdez said. "People would come in period dress, too—sometimes their zoot suits were better than our costumes."

Not everyone was delighted to see the world of the *pachuco* reborn. Some of the Sleepy

Lagoon families, for instance, are still living down the shame of the trial and the tragedy of wasted time. The play also stirred controversy when it played in Texas, where many Chicanos are ashamed of the West Coast *pachuco* image. And in New York, the Broadway version of the stage play failed. Luis Valdez speculates that to many New York Hispanics the *pachuco* image connoted nothing more than "dangerous dude." He also thinks the $25 ticket price was too steep for many in the play's potential audience.

"Some people have said to us, 'You're exposing our secrets—why make a play about this stuff?' And some have told us we're glorifying gang warfare," said Valdez. "But I think it's a production that doesn't have a simple message. It makes Chicanos think as much as it does anyone.

"Theater and film can reveal the human side of these vast social issues. *Zoot Suit* is just one in an encyclopedia of works that need to be made. The US is becoming an Anglo-Hispanic culture—and I mean that linguistically—and we can't afford to be ignorant of each other."

Luis Valdez claims a double allegiance to his art and to his culture, and rejects any mechanical relationship between the two, even in the interests of placating his closest constituency. Daniel Valdez is equally concerned to develop culturally rich art, with his musical talents. He dreams of producing an opera on the subject of the conquest of Mexico.

And *Zoot Suit* is impressive testimony to their goals. El Pachuco cracks through insular Anglo stereotypes. More than that, he is powerful proof of the force, and the limits, of cultural defenses.

But the fainthearted first-run distribution of the film, which was marketed first to major Hispanic centers and then tentatively and briefly given a national break, has given it little chance to transcend the cultural *barrio* of "the Hispanic market." It got a second-time-around chance on cable and continues to pop up on odd weekends at neighborhood theaters. But still, *Zoot Suit*'s lackluster distribution contrasts painfully with its snappy production. —PAT AUFDERHEIDE

RADIO ON

Direction and script: Chris Petit. Camera: Martin Schaffer. Distribution: Grey City Films.

We are the children of Fritz Lang and Werner von Braun. We are the link between the 20's and the 80's. All change in society passes through a sympathetic collaboration with tape recorders, synthesizers, and telephones. Our reality is an electronic reality. —KRAFTWERK

Radio On is something like an extension of the New Wave/Punk look and its music—with that mixture of anomie and defiance—into the time and space of film narrative. What people seem to remember most about Petit's film is that it's a movie full of emptiness—the rock music keeps playing and the protagonist keeps going down the highway, but the quick payoffs of the rock ethos never materialize, and we start thinking about the music as recorded sound and the journey as just another car ride. There is perhaps some Brechtian distanciation in all this, and yet *Radio On* has none of the didactic directness of Brecht or Godard (though Godard's influence is evident in a variety of other ways).

But what makes the film exceptional is its disruption of the conventional relationship between *mise en scène* and representation of character and milieu in movies. By focusing attention on its *mise en scène, Radio On* becomes a species of structuralist film—it shows us its protagonist's world but in a way that forces us to analyze the ways in which that character and that world are presented. Thus, the action of *Radio On* is less a matter of a purposive narrative-journey than of several other kinds of eventfulness—spatial, temporal, visual, aural, musical, emotional, cinematic, etc.—which fill and animate the various voids so studiously provided by the narrative development.

In *Radio On,* a young man, one Robert B., learns that his brother has died, and he journeys by car to the city where the death occurred. He may be taking the familiar *film noir* journey in hopes of solving a crime, but it is not clear that a crime has taken place and the journey resolves nothing. The young man has a variety of encounters, and he has had his female companion walk out on him before the journey has even begun. But his failure to connect is not exactly the point either, though

Lagoon families, for instance, are still living down the shame of the trial and the tragedy of wasted time. The play also stirred controversy when it played in Texas, where many Chicanos are ashamed of the West Coast *pachuco* image. And in New York, the Broadway version of the stage play failed. Luis Valdez speculates that to many New York Hispanics the *pachuco* image connoted nothing more than "dangerous dude." He also thinks the $25 ticket price was too steep for many in the play's potential audience.

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Direction and script: Chris Petit. Camera: Martin Schaffer. Distribution: Grey City Films.

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Radio On is something like an extension of the New Wave/Punk look and its music—with that mixture of anomie and defiance—into the time and space of film narrative. What people seem to remember most about Petit's film is that it's a movie full of emptiness—the rock music keeps playing and the protagonist keeps going down the highway, but the quick payoffs of the rock ethos never materialize, and we start thinking about the music as recorded sound and the journey as just another car ride. There is perhaps some Brechtian distanciation in all this, and yet *Radio On* has none of the didactic directness of Brecht or Godard (though Godard's influence is evident in a variety of other ways).

But what makes the film exceptional is its disruption of the conventional relationship between *mise en scène* and representation of character and milieu in movies. By focusing attention on its *mise en scène, Radio On* becomes a species of structuralist film—it shows us its protagonist's world but in a way that forces us to analyze the ways in which that character and that world are presented. Thus, the action of *Radio On* is less a matter of a purposive narrative-journey than of several other kinds of eventfulness—spatial, temporal, visual, aural, musical, emotional, cinematic, etc.—which fill and animate the various voids so studiously provided by the narrative development.

In *Radio On,* a young man, one Robert B., learns that his brother has died, and he journeys by car to the city where the death occurred. He may be taking the familiar *film noir* journey in hopes of solving a crime, but it is not clear that a crime has taken place and the journey resolves nothing. The young man has a variety of encounters, and he has had his female companion walk out on him before the journey has even begun. But his failure to connect is not exactly the point either, though

it may seem so in terms of conventional narrative expectations.

A variety of themes—social and political despair, the problems of language, pervasive fear—are absorbed in the overall drift of the film, and still others—particularly a kind of urban, post-industrial gloom—simply seem as pervasive as the autoways and the weather. The Irish troubles, British militarism, refugee life, feminism, prejudice, mechanization, English imperial tradition, generation gaps, the plight of factory workers, the consumer culture, and the mass media all crop up as concerns in the film, though less as "issues" than as definitive elements of the modern terrain. Petit's approach is focused above all on formal matters, and so *Radio On* uses those themes and the snatches of dialogue that make them explicit rather as it uses the various snatches of rock music recordings—what we see and what we hear seem to interpenetrate in constantly evolving ways.

The film opens with a lengthy hand-held shot moving into and through an apartment in which what would normally be the climactic detail—the discovery of a corpse in a bathtub—is treated at first as if it were no more significant than any other detail in the shot. This shift of emphasis—from the corpse to the *mise en scène* of the shot in which it appears—alerts the viewer as to how the film should be watched (as well as listened to—Since David Bowie's "Heroes/Helden" is blaring throughout the shot). But striking as this pre-credits prologue is, the film's special characteristics establish themselves even more trenchantly in the first sequence after the credits. The young man who turns out to be the film's main character sits in his car on a city street at night and opens a postal package. We soon see that the package contains three Kraftwerk tapes and a brief birthday message from the young man's brother. He begins to play one of the cassettes on his car's tape deck, then shuts it off; he turns on the windshield wipers as if preparing to go somewhere, but the car remains stationary and there seems to be no rain. He restarts the tape, glances out at the laundromat nearby, and gets out of the car without shutting off the tape; the camera holds on the now "empty" interior of the car and the music on the tape deck continues; then there is a cut to an exterior view of the car as the young man drives it through the streets; eventually he parks it and enters a building next to a theater with *Empire of Passion* on the marquee; as we soon discover, he has come home.

This particular sequence turns out to be central to *Radio On* in several respects: the deliberate undercutting of purposefulness (the windshield wipers; the music played but only partly listened to); the disjunctiveness (the jump cut from motionlessness to motion); the interplay of sound and silence (not only the coming-and-going of the music on the tape deck, but also the windshield wipers and a passing siren as sounds which we are implicitly asked to respond to on a level usually reserved for sound-track songs in movies); the sustained attention to detail independent of narrative purpose (the long take that continues even after its human figure—its conventional "content"—has disappeared). The fact that the tapes are from a brother whom Robert (David Beames) hasn't seen for some time and who will turn out to have been dead by the time they are received will assume some importance, especially in retrospect, as will the latter realization that what Robert is coming home to are evidently the last stages of the painfully drawn-out collapse of his relationship with a live-in female lover. But the sequence distances itself from these contributions to characterization in a way that focuses attention instead on the film's way of presenting itself.

Radio On is not, however, a "pure" exercise in style. If it focuses attention primarily on form, it does so in a way which remains linked to a concern with significant aspects of the milieu in which Robert B. finds himself. Robert B.'s anti-adventure is, among other things, a string of failed relationships. Because Petit does not give customary emphasis to them, these failures seem less a point the movie is trying to make than one it simply takes for granted. The landscape through which the character is moving is crowded with machinery, buildings, music, and—to a lesser extent—other people, but Robert B.'s relation with all this is at once barren and full—barren in traditional terms of narrative emotion, full in postmodernist terms of redirected sense experience. Robert B.'s encounters suggest the richness of possibility of a picaresque novel: a man sleeping in a solitary parked car, a guitar-playing gas station attendant, a nervously

cocky and very youthful Punk, two young German women, the mother-in-law of one of the Germans, a Scot who has been stationed in Northern Ireland and who plans to go AWOL, the female companion of Robert's late brother, and Robert's own estranged lover (who is first seen staring at three TV sets banked against a wall of their apartment). But the "sleeping" man drives away after failing to acknowledge the stranded Robert's plea for help, and Robert ditches the soldier, apparently for his anger and arrogance; the brother's companion upsets all of Robert's assumptions about his dead brother (and, consequently, about the journey he has taken), and one of the German women notes that she thought Robert was going to sleep with her but he didn't. The gas station attendant and the young Punk both seem to share Robert's interest in rock music, but Robert pays for the gas with money which he admits he's stolen from the station till, and he must bribe the youngster (by paying for a hot dog) to get directions to a rock club. The German woman talks about language barriers and the feelings of the dispossessed, but Robert seems almost as peculiarly detached from her as he is from the Scot soldier when he says he never really understood the Irish "troubles."

"Robert B."—is that punk-chic or Kafka revived or both? Words, and language in general, exercise a certain mystery in *Radio On,* while they are also given a certain materiality. The protagonist's hit-and-miss communication with his German-speaking companions evokes a "failure to connect," but even more it gives rise to a linguistic aspect of the film's materialist/deconstructionist dimension. Despite the language barrier, Robert and the German woman (Lisa Kreuzer) understand each other rather well—there is considerable sympathy between them and their not making love is perhaps a "failure" only in terms of the audience expectations which the movie is exposing by frustrating. Both play with each other's language, and a scene in which they read together from a German/English tourist guidebook plays with the idea of language as both a link and a difference between people. Later Robert is pointedly excluded (as is an English-speaking audience) from a conversation with the woman and her bilingual mother-in-law, when the latter angrily switches to German

David Beames and Liza Kreuzer: RADIO ON

(for which, here as elsewhere, the film supplies no subtitles). This latter scene is concerned with a generation gap (one which Robert denies, saying that "everyone's afraid" nowadays), but the gap is evident regardless of the language used. Though he usually seems to speak only reluctantly, Robert has a certain talent for serious wordplay: at one point, he views Britishers' attraction to the seashore as a tendency toward "last resorts," and at another, he gradually permutes a quoted line, "She's delicate, she seems like Vermeer," into "She seems like the mirror." Both the malleability and the intractability of language emerge from these aspects of the film, and all this links up with a concern with codes (misreadings of other people's quotidian behavior recur).* But much of what occurs in the film "translates" quite well: *Radio On* is English and yet it frequently looks far more "German" (Wim Wenders is the film's associate producer, and echoes of his films are not hard to find) as well as "French" (Bresson, Hanoun, Rivette, and the Godard of *Alphaville* and *Masculin/Feminin* seem pertinent influences as well).

Through all this, Robert B. engages interest in several ways. The film's tendency to limit itself more or less to his point of view is a crucial if obvious factor, but even more important are his relation to the film's vividly apprehended landscape and his small gestures of revolt. The latter is couched very much in the film's rock cultural background, yet its impact should be unmistakable even with a less initiated audience. While tending to his disc jockey

*I am indebted to Marion Bronson on this and other points.

duties, he reads over the air a request for "Help Me Make It Through the Night," but promptly announces that "Here's something better," and plays Ian Dury's "Sweet Gene Vincent" instead. This little revolt against the proprieties of commercial broadcasting has meaning even if one is not aware that Robert's coolly impudent choice represents a New Wave rejection of AM-radio sentimentality. And the gesture has special meaning precisely because it is a violation of broadcasting decorum: the "electronic reality" which the film evokes through the virtual omnipresence of recorded rock music is crucial to the tension which exists in the film's vision, and Robert B.'s small gesture constitutes a glimmer of defiance which seems sadly missing in much of the rest of the film's social landscape—until the final scene, at least.

The settings include a video games emporium, a couple of roadside pubs, a run-down gas station, a seaside resort, a car-dealer's show room, a couple of apartments and a hotel room, a car wash, and an abandoned quarry. Transiency marks all of these settings, and the characters inhabit them like the sullen, lonely travellers they tend to be. And the truly dominant settings, an automobile and a string of highways and side roads, are even more patently associated with transiency. All of this, in turn, also marks *Radio On* as a "road movie," or seems to: for insofar as Robert B.'s journey and quest lead nowhere, this story inverts the road movie's tendency to use its passing settings as a colorful, varied backdrop for its protagonist's adventures; on the contrary, in Petit's film, the setting seems to move to the foreground with Robert's anti-adventure becoming a more or less static emotional backdrop. The overall result is rather like a rock culture variation on Antonioni, a latter-day black-and-white version of *Red Desert*'s mutedly sci-fi landscape: questions of character may be at an impasse, but so much in the character's surroundings is seen with such acuity, such first-person freshness, that the movie offers up a precise, defamiliarized kind of awareness which is implicitly available to the central character as well. When Robert and the German woman drive through a sunny landscape "marred" by large transmission-line pylons, the question of survival—of humanity as well as of its technological artefacts —arises, but only in ways that raise questions rather than answering them or linking them up with other observations in the film. Human survival *does* seem in doubt, and yet the pylons have a peculiar beauty even as they are viewed as inanimate objects which may "survive" the human race's decline. That "peculiar beauty," which comes in part from being more and more at home in a world of manufactured objects, seems to inform the beautiful strangeness of *Radio On* itself.

Petit does occasionally use his settings to make a discursive point—as with the distant, impersonal views inside a factory while "Sweet Gene Vincent" plays on the sound track or with the sodden gas-station sequence in which Robert's dour, tentative encounter with a man (Sting, of The Police) improvising a version of Eddie Cochran's "Three Steps to Heaven" on an unplugged electric guitar contrasts the musical impulse with the damp gloom of the weather and the junk-yard clutter of the station itself. There and elsewhere Petit is establishing a dialectic between a patently sterile wasteland setting and the transformative possibilities evoked by the sheer presence of the music. That this dialectic elicits a potential for defiance in the film's environment becomes especially clear in the quarry scene at the end. There Petit's protagonist conducts himself on first a descent and then an ascent, both by automobile, before driving the car to the edge of the precipice, whereupon he—*partly* by accident, it seems—comes to the point of a suicidal gesture, which he nevertheless does not make. Instead, having discovered that his car is irretrievably poised on the brink, he puts one of his brother's gift cassettes on the tape player and walks away (presumably to catch the train which we see arriving and then departing in a final long take at a rural crossroads). Here again, but more dramatically than before, the music (Kraftwerk's "Ohm, Sweet Ohm") is used to transform a situation: the sound virtually "fills" an "empty," barren visual image; the transformative music and Robert's abandonment of the car and the tapes change his quest's dead end into an ironic defiance, a negation of negation.

At the same time, Petit's *mise en scène* does much to evoke the paradoxical spirit of this final "positive" gesture of futility: while long takes are the film's definitive mode, this last

sequence fairly bristles with montage; the heightened awareness of duration persists, but the sudden profusion of shots endows the action with a subtle rhythmic intensity that would be "conventional" at this point were it not devoted to yet another of the film's anti-climactic passages. Whereas such rhythms are customarily used to arouse interest and expectations, Petit uses them once again to deny expectations and to focus attention, in yet another way, on a level of eventfulness usually ignored by moviemakers.

Even in light of its qualities as an anti-adventure, *Radio On*'s most dramatic elements of formal play have to do with its use of rock music. The music, an array of excerpted "New Wave" recordings, is especially significant because so much of it is chosen and listened to by the main character, but also because so many of the film's most striking effects have to do with the complex interplay of the possible relations between the visual images and the sound track. Some of the music, quietly and somewhat ironically, mirrors the action: Wreckless Eric's "Veronika," a song about a soldier missing his girlfriend, turns up on the car radio while Robert is riding with the hitch-hiking soldier; David Bowie's "Always Crashing in the Same Car" is played in one of the film's lengthy sequences with Robert alone in the car on the highway. Bowie's "Heroes/Helden" is ironic in that Robert is so patently anti-heroic and apposite in that the film's dialogue, like the song's lyrics, is in both German and English. The electronic sounds of Robert Fripp and Kraftwerk provide an eerily futuristic atmosphere in keeping with the post-*Alphaville* contemporaneity of this film in which the camera pauses over a handwritten quotation which begins, "We are the children of Fritz Lang and Werner von Braun."

But Petit's subtlest and most intriguing use of the music has to do with a distancing manipulation of the sound track. In one continuous highway sequence, Petit alternates interior shots *without* music and exterior shots *with* music: the effect is to make us conscious of the arbitrariness of the convention by which movie shots of cars on highways are almost always accompanied by upbeat music. In a later sequence, the music accompanies the image while the car is in motion, but when the car is stopped for a traffic light, the music ceases; the car is viewed from a distance in long take as it waits for the light to change; when the light does change and the car begins to move again, the music resumes though the distant long take continues. Right after this, in an overhead long shot, the same music (at a lower volume) is heard as the car negotiates a freeway turn past some huge modern apartment buildings; the music fades as the car disappears into the industrialized landscape, but the shot is held and distant railway noises emerge on the sound track as a train crosses the freeway and adds unexpected elements of order and movement to what is already a

complex visual composition. Again this makes us aware of music used as an expressive device: the long take at the traffic light insists on the validity of silence and motionlessness as a kind of anti-matter counterpoint to the overly familiar cars-and-music combination. And the high angle cityscape-with-freeway treats expressionistic/subjective sound (the music) and realistic/objective sound (the train noises) as contrasting forms of artifice which have equal validity as expressive contrivances, and which make us aware of how selective the sound track is—given a shot in which many more sounds might have had a justifiable place in the aural element of the film. And the literal distancing of both shots comments on the role of music in the movie and in Robert B.'s life: the music which accompanies his journey is at once a figment of his mechanized electronic environment and a means of transforming his experience of it.

Throughout, *Radio On* immerses itself and its story in the most emblematic paraphernalia of post-World War II youth: pop music, automobiles, anomie, and mechanical repetition. And perhaps Robert *is* one of the children of Franz Kafka and the Sex Pistols—have it both ways and see what you get: an electronic ghetto where, as the protagonist says, "everybody's afraid." Robert's pun about Britishers' attraction to "last resorts" is actually very much in keeping with the film's pervasive air of sullen end-of-the-line desperation. When a tough, pool-shooting female knocks Robert off his barstool ("You ruined my fucking shot"), he attempts no defense of his inadvertent act: he lives on the other side of empire and its male prerogatives, and his nervous system is tuned not to machismo and male pride but to the social circuitry of the juke box and the pinball machine. Robert is an alien in the presence of the sturdy woman with the pool cue, and if he appears to her to be a klutz rather than a sort of visitor from the near-future, it's perhaps because he, like the movie, operates best in terms of invisible action (the recorded music) and visible inaction (the stillness of a mechanically transported form). The movie fills itself up the way an empty house gets filled up when you turn on the stereo or the TV. There is no trick here—we see the machinery's inner workings all along, and Robert B. seems to show that a certain breed of alien being is increasingly common, increasingly less alien. It's only rock and roll and it's only TV and tape cassettes, but you're different afterward and so is the world.

Few films since the heroic period of the Nouvelle Vague have been so richly in touch with the nuances of contemporary existence. Petit's biggest achievement is to have created a film which both evokes and responds to that contemporary sense of things. Socially and cinematically it bespeaks a weariness with conventional angles of vision. The slowed-down, sprung rhythms of its narrative reflect the exhaustion of conventional narrative in the face of contemporary experience while its defamiliarized attentiveness provides an alternative to that exhaustion. Its consistent success in making its world look both alien and ordinary gives new and unexpected life to Paul Valéry's classical-modernist dictum that nothing is true unless it is strange. And if Petit's movie is a British *Alphaville,* a collision between the past moving forward and the future moving backward, it is also a post-Brechtian musical which challenges its audience and creates its own tactics in ways that *Performance* and *O Lucky Man!,* two other masterpieces of this almost nonexistent genre, can't match. Both of those earlier British films used rock music and a young man's journey to push a sense of crisis to the point of a call for restructuring consciousness. But *Radio On* begins on the other side of that point and opens up new aesthetic territory in ways that matter and for reasons that are never merely aesthetic. —PETER HOGUE

BARBAROSA

Director: Fred Schepisi. Script: William D. Witliff. Photography: Ian Baker.

Fred Schepisi's *Barbarosa* looks like a Western, but at heart it's a ghost story. It opens with a magnificent desert landscape, a composition of rocks, mesas, sky, and open land that looks hard-edged and immutable—and then it begins to change. The light keeps shifting—the background darkens, then the foreground, the middle ground lights up like a radiant stripe across the screen, then it's all reversed, and a shadow seems to darken boulders one at a time, in abrupt, unpredictable jumps—changing in ways we can't quite follow, or

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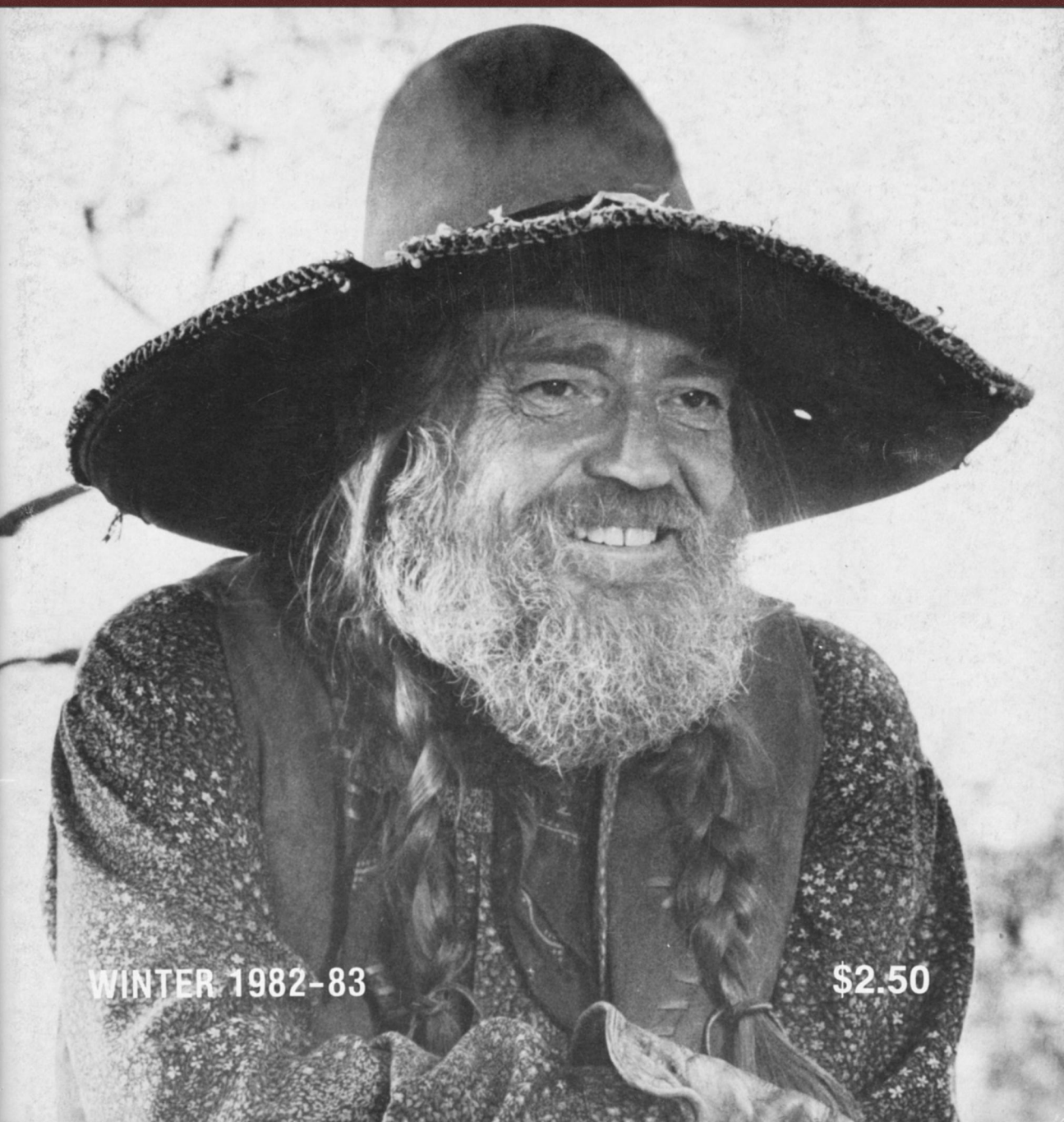

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fix into a pattern. This mysterious landscape is seen several times more in the course of the film, and the narrative never places the characters in it. But in *Barbarosa* the western landscape is a haunted house: we know the mythic characters are there, whether we see them or not. There's a moment early in the film when Barbarosa seems to pop up out of nowhere, as if he's ridden up out of the ground; and there's a moment later on when he seems to disappear into thin air as he's running through a forest. *Barbarosa* is full of wandering, of sudden departures and unexpected returns, movements that seem as capricious as the light on the desert—but all within a fixed frame, a sharply limited physical and psychological geography; the film is all repetitions, variations, echoes.

The fixed frame here is a story of exile, a story whose details emerge gradually, one small bit at a time. Barbarosa (Willie Nelson) has been a fugitive from his own family for thirty years, driven from the Zavala home on his wedding night by his father-in-law, Don Braulio (Gilbert Roland). He's condemned to circle around his own wife and daughter, darting through Braulio's defenses for two furtive visits a year, spending the rest of his time eluding and, reluctantly, killing the young Zavala men who are sent out to kill him. Karl (Gary Busey), the farm boy whom Barbarosa picks up along the way, is on the run from his in-laws, too: he killed his sister's husband in a fight. Karl, clearly, is an image of the young Barbarosa—he sees his future in the old outlaw, and Barbarosa sees his past in him. They tell their stories to each other as they ride through the ghostly landscapes, and as they sit by the fire at the camps they make in the ruined adobe shells of abandoned homes.

Karl's story is a simple one, but Barbarosa's is complex, full of history—a story that's lost its innocence. When Braulio tells it to a room full of Zavala boys—boys whom he will some day send out, one by one, in search of Barbarosa—the legend comes out in one smooth piece, polished by years of telling and retelling, too perfect for us to trust it very much. And the children seem to know their responses by heart, like a litany: Braulio may tell them this story every night, sitting in his windowless, cavelike room spinning the image of a mythic Barbarosa out of thin air. But on the night we hear the story, the living Barbarosa is elsewhere in the house, visiting his wife, and Karl, his eventual successor, is watching and listening at Braulio's door.

Gary Busey and Willie Nelson: BARBAROSA

This may be *Barbarosa*'s strangest scene: it's an important bit of exposition, but it comes halfway through the movie and its staging is stylized almost to the point of parody (the flickering light and cavernous decor; the hushed, automaton-like responses of the children; the squawking raven at Braulio's side). But it's a crucial scene, a graphic illustration of how superfluous the real Barbarosa has become. He's in the house, within Braulio's reach, but the old Don is unaware of his presence, totally possessed by the mythical Barbarosa that he's created. Barbarosa isn't onscreen at all while Braulio tells his story, yet he's present, defined completely by the elements of his myth: Braulio, its author; the Zavala boys, its audience; and Karl, its future incarnation. As the scene goes on, the bizarre ghost-story atmosphere seems more and more appropriate. The living man who's known as "Barbarosa" (we never do learn his real name) doesn't exist here, doesn't need to—he's been disembodied.

Barbarosa isn't the first of Schepisi's heroes to suffer this fate. The seminary teachers in his first film, *The Devil's Playground,* have spent their lives trying to forget their bodies—to "transcend" them—and some of them, a little horrified, realize that they've succeeded. Their aim is to become pure spirit, and that's what they're teaching their students, too: one seminarian boasts of being so alienated from his body that he no longer feels discomfort or pain, and in his attempt to prove it by swimming in a freezing creek, he dies—the ultimate

transcendence. What's moving about *The Devil's Playground* is that its characters *know,* or are in the process of finding out, that their goal is a kind of death—the denial of their sexual urges makes them feel a little unreal to themselves, almost spectral.

The hero of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* feels unreal, too. As an aborigine in a white society, he's invisible to his masters. When, in frustration, he murders the white family that he can't be a part of, he *makes* himself visible, forces the society to acknowledge his existence. But his social existence is still just an image in the minds of his oppressors: he's now a legend, a symbol—the murderous, ungrateful black. And, of course, he's forfeited everything with his crime; from the moment he commits his first murder, he's a dead man. All of Schepisi's films are ghost stories: they're about people who exist for others only as spirits, myths, abstractions, people who have died to the world in advance of their physical deaths—and who continue to live in some strange, painful middle ground, homeless, neither here nor there.

Barbarosa, though, doesn't have the grim intensity of the earlier films. Barbarosa's the oldest of Schepisi's protagonists, the one who's lived with his situation the longest, and he's gone past anguish to a kind of resignation: even when night puts him in a melancholy, reflective mood, his words of wisdom are, "What can't be remedied must be endured." What Barbarosa has to endure is the living out of the legend created by Braulio's obsession, a myth that he knows can't be changed or destroyed but only manipulated a bit, played with. The pain is there, but after thirty years Barbarosa isn't a tormented or an angry spirit—he's rather a wistful, prankish one. The tragic force of the earlier films is present only in Karl's story: he's younger, his wounds are fresher, and he's not at all used to being the object of another man's obsessive vengeance. When he arrives back home after months of wandering with Barbarosa and is forced to kill Herman Pahmeyer (the vengeful father of the man he killed), his violence isn't cathartic: Karl doesn't *want* to kill Pahmeyer, and the act doesn't change anything, anyway —Karl's father is already dead, and he loses his only sister not long after. Karl feels no triumph, and we share his feeling of emptiness. It's the way Barbarosa must have felt after killing his first Zavala: Karl shouts "No!" before shooting Pahmeyer—just as we've heard Barbarosa do before killing one of his would-be assassins. This is Schepisi's characteristic method, building his film with a gradual accumulation of details, repetitions, allusions, towards a climax which illuminates the film's concerns without fully resolving them.

Those details and allusions are more densely layered in *Barbarosa* than ever before—so densely, in fact, that it's just about impossible to sort out all the repetitions and variations in the film's visual and narrative motifs. They just merge into a single, omnipresent entity, a kind of persistent echo like the swelling chants of "Barbarosa" that occur at several points in the course of the film. The allusions are hypnotic, like a rhyme scheme, and they all have to do with death (a cantina that looks like a burial mound; Barbarosa rising from his grave as Karl is burying him; Barbarosa cauterizing a wound, smoke rising from his body as he applies the burning stick, a shot later recalled by an aerial view of his cremation) or with the gradual convergence of Karl's identity and Barbarosa's (the marks on the cheek that each receives in his first scene—Karl's from a thorn, Barbarosa's from a Zavala bullet; Karl's early chance encounter with Eduardo, ultimately Barbarosa's killer; the shouts of "No!" before killing). The first time Barbarosa and Karl appear in the same frame, they're bending over a dead Zavala.

The extraordinarily dense texture produces interesting effects, unexpected ones. One thing it *doesn't* produce is a symbolic structure: the repetitions and variations don't "work out" to a coherent statement about myth, or identity, or anything else. Schepisi and his screenwriter William Witliff (who also wrote *Raggedy Man*) aren't even very interested in exploring the truth or falsity of the myth: Barbarosa's isn't an heroic myth, one that the man himself must be measured against and found worthy or unworthy; and by the end of the film we *still* don't have a full, reliable account of the incident that caused the rift between Braulio and Barbarosa, the origin of the legend. Schepisi's real subject is less abstract, but more elusive, more mysterious. *Barbarosa* is about how it feels to live inside a myth, to be a character in someone else's

story—how it *feels* to be turned into a ghost. The myth is always there, but only as the landscape the characters ride through, the fixed frame, the house they haunt. And the repetition of motifs is what creates this effect of enclosure: the narrative moves easily, loosely, from one incident to the next, ranging over a vast and various landscape, but it keeps coming back to the same themes, the same locations, wandering and then returning home. The landscape becomes *familiar.* By the last third of the film, the visual and narrative associations have piled up to such an extent that every scene is charged with a kind of inevitability; everything, by that point, feels to the viewer like remembered experience.

So we know before Karl does that he's going to assume Barbarosa's myth after the outlaw's death. We've already seen him become a part of the myth, the "gringo child" who rides with Barbarosa; we've seen him begin to fall in love with the outlaw's daughter; we've seen him shoot a gun exactly as Barbarosa's taught him; we've seen him grow a wispy, reddish beard; we've seen him lose his own home, his own family; we've seen him ride with Barbarosa through a desert so bright, so dazzling that both riders become, for a moment, transparent. We know, too, that Barbarosa the man has been dead to the Zavala family for thirty years: Karl's just another body to fill the myth, a slight shift in the light on the landscape. And Schepisi has created a vision of the West in which death and loss are the constant background, and memory's as tangible as the rocks—the ruined adobes, the half-buried bodies sticking up out of the sand. When Karl rides into Braulio's courtyard, whirls his horse around, and disappears back into the night, he's become the tangible memory of Barbarosa—just as Barbarosa, for better than half his life, had been the memory of himself.

And just as *Barbarosa*—unlike most Westerns which reach back into the past or the history of the genre for their emotional resonance—creates its own past, its own memories within the viewer. *Barbarosa* is too original, too self-sufficient to be judged as a Western. It is, rather, the latest of Fred Schepisi's fables about the oppressions and losses that turn men into ghosts. —TERRENCE RAFFERTY

Books

SAMUEL GOLDWYN

By Lawrence J. Epstein. Boston: Twayne, 1981. $14.95.

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The paradox of finding a book on Samuel Goldwyn in the serious tomes of the Twayne Series, whose cornerstone is the auteur theory, brings to mind the most famous Goldwynism: "Include me out." Sam himself believed in the auteur theory, but did not include directors in it. His consciousness of spearheading his productions is what called for Lawrence J. Epstein's account of Goldwyn as the "auteur" of those films we have been calling Otto Preminger's *Porgy and Bess,* King Vidor's *Stella Dallas,* Mervyn Le Roy's *Tonight or Never,* John Ford's *Arrowsmith,* Dorothy Arzner's *Nana,* Howard Hawks's *Ball of Fire,* and among several films by William Wyler, *The Little Foxes, The Westerner, Wuthering Heights, Dead End,* and *The Best Years of Our Lives.* Epstein has brought all these films, plus the Goldwyn-produced Danny Kaye comedies and Eddie Cantor entertainments, under one umbrella to scrutinize the operation Sammy ran.

The Goldwyn legacy, writes Epstein, is a challenge to film-makers to make quality pictures despite a temptation to pander to public taste in the cheapest way; further, not to succumb to Hollywood's dread of literary sources and great writers; finally, to allow one's social conscience to be tempered by an awareness of the devastating effect of many problems on the human personality.

Goldwyn's aim to enlighten, educate and awe his audiences by immersing them in the worlds of great writers is portrayed as a legitimate and honest endeavor. Epstein tries to lay to rest a misguided interpretation of Goldwyn's penchant for great literature as a status symbol to counterbalance his public image as a linguistic buffoon. And he succeeds by showing how doggedly Goldwyn would work (others)

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until he was sure the great classic conformed to his conception of it. His was, nevertheless, a labor of love, for popularizing the classics never raked in the dough.

Goldwyn's social ambitions lay not in the direction of wealth but in those more abstract dreams of a generation of immigrants whose visions of America were forged through effort and persecution unknown to detractors who speak of the pablum of the Hollywood dream machine. Goldwyn the producer had "the power to realize not only his own dreams but to make them come to life for everyone," comments Epstein, perhaps forgetting that his exercise of that power brought him under the yoke with others whose dreams were perhaps more nightmarish or differentiated, and which all required compromises on the part of the uncompromising Mr. Goldwyn—and resulted in things like the blow-up with Lilliam Hellman after many years of close cooperation. One of Goldwyn's bravest attempts to adapt controversial material to the screen, it will be remembered, was his acquisition of Hellman's *The Children's Hour* in 1935. It took a Goldwyn to get around the scandal by going to the heart of the matter and Hellman's original intentions, says Epstein. To Goldwyn's credit, no matter how he mangled or had others mangle the literary sources he depended on, he kept some very good writers in clover, and if anyone can lay claim to being the "Marryin' Sam" of literature and film, it is Goldwyn. That it was a shotgun wedding remains a moot point.

"Goldwyn never defined what he wanted in a good society beyond the politically liberal clichés of his era," concludes Epstein, after a close reading of *The Best Years of Our Lives.* The sentimentalizing of the American promise and the oversimplification of the typical American situations are flaws of almost every Goldwyn film, and Epstein's generosity with the man does not extend to his films. In fact, he examines so many of Goldwyn's misbegotten financial failures that, at some point, one is unsure what got Goldwyn's reputation out of the ground, as he might have said. (Incidentally, the apocryphal and not-so-Goldwynisms would have added some zest to Epstein's prose.)

Epstein never reduces his work to a scorecard of Goldwyn's laws, flaws and faux pas. He notes in the great producer's favor that he always went after the best, but shows the complexity of that in an untried situation—discovering actors or technical developments. When sound came in, he located the best sound engineer he could find, and then two screenwriters to utilize fully the new possibility. The result was *This Is Heaven,* but it starred a Hungarian actress Vilma Banky whose extraordinary accent made her unintelligibly lugubrious in her tender love scenes. Despite Goldwyn's know-how and ability to learn from mistakes, he made the same mistake years later in the case of a Ukrainian actress Anna Sten, whose beauty was not aural. This "flaw" indicates not so much his blind spot, but rather Goldwyn's idealistic faith in the cinema to transcend nationalities and languages. He repeatedly tried to force foreign accents on American audiences, perhaps as an extension of his own infamous mangling of the language.

Goldwyn's first film, a 1923 silent, *The Eternal City,* featured two people on different sides of the political fence in pre-Mussolini Italy. Although his sympathies were on the wrong side of that conflict, his ideological orientation shortly became wildly freedom-loving. Because he was a man capable of chameleon-like adaptation, as many immigrants were, he modified what he had found in the theater and created cinema stereotypes out of stage stereotypes. Epstein argues that Goldwyn accepted the public's expectations as valid and dealt out caricatures upon demand, and that for better or worse, it was the public, not the artist, who determined popular culture in America.

And yet a film as intense and challenging (for its time) as *The Best Years of Our Lives* was the product of Goldwyn's years of experiment and experience. What is missing in this book is an opinion, or even good argumentation, on how Goldwyn's products affected American popular culture or altered public expectations, which they surely did. He was a man, after all, who thought in terms like, "I don't care how much money it makes, as long as every man, woman and child in America see it." "In his mind," notes Epstein, "art was not art until it was seen by many." Perhaps it was Samuel Goldwyn who dug the foundations for pop art.

Epstein is at his best when treating a film like *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,* explaining the film as a process, an elaborate system of deals and compromises and contradictions.

Epstein portrays Goldwyn as a "never-say-die" handyman of genres, always trying to mix them, thinking the public got more for its money that way. For example, with musicals he had had such a string of failures that when it came time to wind up his career, he concentrated his last efforts on conquering that medium with one of the most difficult productions to ever blaze a trail—*Porgy and Bess.* Even after having his

Much can be said of Goldwyn, obviously, and the Twayne Series should be credited with contributing this much to the growing theory of the producer/auteur. What information it can bring to bear on our opinions of a film can be seen by comparing this treatment of *The North Star* (1943) with that of Joseph R. Millichap in his Twayne volume *Lewis Milestone,* the director of that "strange blend of corny romantics and occasional moments of cinematic insight," as Millichap calls it. It seems each author is more than willing to give his auteur responsibility for the failure.

Goldwyn's and Milestone's careers crossed at this juncture; "Samuel Goldwyn's only serious film made during WWII in which the war itself was the setting," says Epstein. Fresh from making *Edge of Darkness,* Milestone was the obvious choice as director for the property Lillian Hellman and William Wyler brought to Goldwyn. (Presumably Wyler was making documentaries for the Air Force, or he would have made it, although neither author comments on this, despite it being a perfect test case for Epstein's criterion for a Goldwyn film: "Suppose Y instead of X had directed, would the film still be close to what it was? Suppose someone instead of Goldwyn had produced, would the film still be the same?"

Millichap, for his part, securely based in director/auteurism, plunges into his account as if the film had been conceived by Milestone: "His Russian film is titled after a farming commune, . . . a fictional place not far in imagination from . . . the capital of Bessarabia, where Milestone was raised, or from the real villages portrayed in the Soviet newsreel footage he edited into *Our Russian Front* a year earlier." Epstein, on the other hand, discusses Hellman's attempt to secure Soviet permission to film, and names two reasons for hiring Milestone which don't square with Millichap's view of his auteur's art. Epstein mentions Milestone's criticism of the Hellman script and the resulting quarrel, after which she never worked again for Goldwyn; he adds that the script never really got any better.

Millichap is very hard on the picture; "Although the production credits of *The North Star* are impressive, the end product is not." And, ". . . the excesses of patriotism and propaganda overpower what might have been a fine effort. . . ." Yet his plot synopsis lasts five pages, Epstein's barely two. Millichap's effort to describe the propaganda purposes of such films meets with a counterthrust from Epstein, who rationalizes the film's weaknesses as Goldwyn's attempt to overcome his own prejudices against the Communist system, and attributes, nevertheless, the decision to film in Hollywood as based on the fact that the American public could not distinguish between Russian-as-peasant and Russian-as-Bolshevik. (Neither could the government.) "Goldwyn was certainly not willing to make a film which even remotely seemed to glorify the Communist system," he writes. Yet, it was Milestone who had to answer to the Un-American Activities folks for the film's views; he took the fifth.

Surely, the evidence for producer/auteurism is in Epstein's favor, and nothing is more conclusive than Milestone's own remarks, "It was the only film I've done with Goldwyn—which is no reflection on *him.* . . . he was too adamant, too dictatorial, and you had to go his way, because he'd never change his mind about anything." Millichamp's account gives further credence to the power of the producer in the case of *The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers,* in which producer Hal Wallis inserted sexy close-ups of his latest protégée, and broke Milestone's rhythm.

At first glance, Lewis Milstein and Sam Goldfisch have a lot in common, with their strange insistence on social consciousness with happy endings. It made Milestone a master of *film noir* and a victim of the system, forced to work with stars cast in wrong vehicles, such as *Arch of Triumph,* where Ingrid Bergman plays a French whore and Charles Boyer a German refugee doctor. His very good *Of Mice and Men* failed commercially because the studio did not know how to sell a non-generic narrative. Likewise, *The Red Pony* got peddled as a children's film. In such accounts, Millichap proves to have done his homework, even read unused scripts, and provides necessary

background on Steinbeck's career in Hollywood, a small extra of this book.

Millichap is thorough in all things, often at the expense of efficiency. He will provide painstaking plot summaries of both book and film, as well as a scene-by-scene film critique. He knows what has been cut out and why Milestone highlighted one thing over another. To provide context, he mentions later remakes or television versions of the films to give an idea of their own singular careers. He was lucky enough to have access to unpublished articles and Milestone's private papers. Millichap speaks authoritatively on the genre of war films, Milestone's contributions, as well as on the public opinion that informed their development through three wars. His passage on *Halls of Montezuma* could be a fine independent article on a career that began with *All Quiet on the Western Front* and ended with *Pork Chop Hill.*

Millichap portrays "the quiet craftsman" with undisguised admiration, and a conviction that his creativity was rooted in the studio system, although hampered by it. Precisely because of this, he proves to be a key director both historically and artistically, heretofore neglected. He recreates the thoughtful, poignant and ironic vision of Milestone the man and how it was altered, compromised and made negotiable by Hollywood and its stars. No more lovingly informed book has been written about a Hollywood hack.

—KAREN JAEHNE

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA

By Christian Metz. London: Macmillan 1982. £15.

British writers (notably Peter Wollen and Ben Brewster) were principally responsible for disseminating Metz and semiology in Anglo-American film culture, and their importation of it requires a word of explanation.

British high culture so disdained media studies that our one and only Professor of Film Studies remains Thorold Dickinson, between 1967 and 1971. From 1983 the very department which he then headed will be no more.

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Otherwise film studies in Britain is the child of education's mushroom expansion in the sixties, when the old universities' reluctance to (a) go technological (as distinct from scientific) and (b) sacrifice quality for quantity, induced the government to establish a system of polytechnics which wasted no time in following old-fashioned academic ways (such is the inertia of culture, including students' own expectations and goals).

For film studies the outcome was a curious correspondence with French academia. There the study of the arts had been more stagnant still, and still corresponded to Anglo-American aesthetics of around 1920. In scientific thought, too, France's recent record has been dismal, and when French education was transformed during the fifties and sixties, the emphasis lay not on scientific thought but on technocratic systemization, which is a very different thing.

From this angle, French structuralism was a functional equivalent of approaches which the best Anglo-American culture had assimilated, more slowly and surely, over the preceding forty years: New Criticism reading habits *plus* semantics (from Ogden-Richards to Tarski), *plus* logical empiricism (from Popper to Lakatos), *plus* psychoanalysis *plus* cognitive-perceptual psychology *plus* cultural sociology. While certain subcultures remained retarded, the underlying paradigms had converged and successfully coalesced, with or without rationalization—and problems for rationalization, like Gödel's Proof, were well-known.

In contrast, structuralist metatheory was laggard, sudden, and immature. It possessed only one set of paradigms, the particularly narrow ones characteristic of a subprovince within linguistics. Its modus operandi was less scientific than technocratic, less technocratic than theoretical (in an old-fashioned, Cartesian way), and less theoretical than (Ayer would say) metaphysical. Its postulates were unverifiable (and unfalsifiable) because they depended on arbitrary selections from an infinite range of possibilities. Far from being a short cut to the scientific study of the humanities, it's a short circuit in any multi-disciplinary project.

In Britain the new film "polytariat" turned, naturally enough, not to old high culture, but to French film theory. And in importing it, it imported also the French parochialism which knew little and cared less about forty years of Anglo-American aesthetic theory. This incredible innocence induced, in England, a curious internal alienation, which was aggravated by two further factors. First was the confusion, in the minds of French literati like Robbe-Grillet and Barthes, between scientific method and technological drill. This "degree zero" of culture was compounded for militant Marxists under Althusser's influence: too anxious to extricate themselves from bourgeois thought, yet exaggerating the difficulties of doing so, they rejected all its most advanced sectors (including its massive convergence with Marxism) and fetishised its technocratic *vices*.

The ravages of this double deculturization are particularly clear in Wollen's *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* and in the Editorial to the Metz-centered issue of *Screen* (Spring/Summer 1973).

Metz's first book, *Film Language* (1968) represents an early structuralist phase and exerted enormous influence on Anglo-America. To that academic continent it was imported principally by the network, which intermittently became a phalanx, of militant Marxists concentrated in and around the SEFT and the BFI. (I've been asked to specify, presumably for slow readers, that (a) many semiologists, particularly in the USA, are not Marxists, (b) many Marxists, even in Britain, are not semiologists, and (c) Marxists are probably a minority within the BFI as a whole. Now read on.) Cultural developments *within* the BFI remain crucial for America too, since it's the largest, richest and most highly organized center of film studies in either country.

The Marxist structuralists rejected Metz's phenomenological side (whose idealism they exaggerated) and drifted away from his influence towards the brute rigidities epitomized by Althusser. Meanwhile, the influence of *Film Language* succumbed to a barrage of criticisms, notably the finely worked critique by Brian Henderson at Buffalo, and, as Raymond Bellour remarked at Venice in 1979, no French film theorist now looks for guidance from linguistics.

Psychoanalysis and Cinema groups texts written between 1973 and 1977 and published in France as *Le Signifiant Imaginaire*. Metz

opens by remarking that he will be charged with abandoning his earlier positions and projects, and it's possible that the same wish-fulfillment drives his, and *Screen's*, resort to Freud through the Lacan glass. The hope is that the illogicalities of Unconscious process will justify—or at least screen—the gaps and contradictions in linguistic structuralism.

Lucan's expulsion from the French Freudian circle has an excellent theoretical justification: his entirely unconvincing attempt to subordinate Freudian theory to linguistic structuralism in its narrowest form yet. Naturally he convinced many French formalists, and, it seems, Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe, editors of the series in which the Metz appears.

Predictably, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* ignores the long-established assimilation of Freudian theory in Anglo-American culture (no word of Bateson, Wolfenstein and Leites, Kracauer, Dichter, *et al.*). Instead it swallows Lacan bones, feathers, fur, and all. It represents a structuralism Mark II, a.k.a. post-structuralism, which is actually a repudiation of Mark I. It seeks to rejig structuralist concepts around a formalism which is finally learning a postulate of (bourgeois, and particularly American) communication theory: the formative effect of the society-spectator-medium-form relay. Metz maintains his friendly distance from Althusserianism (purist or post-, neo- or quasi-), but his text comes to us via a militant con-text. One of its translators, Ben Brewster, was Althusser's translator, while Heath and MacCabe presumably intend the volume as a blow against bourgeois traditions (or their crazy notions thereof).

Metz declares; "My dream today is to speak of the cinematic dream in terms of a code." (But what is a code? We find no reference to Wilden's criticisms of Metz's confusion on that point in *System and Structure,* 1972, and it's absent from the bibliography of *Language and Cinema,* 1974). Metz usefully explores some component problems, moving between spectator psychology (some Lacan, some Freud, with Anglo-American work noted only indirectly, through a terse reference to Morin) and linguistic meaning (mostly Jakobsonian: as for Anglo-American theory, there's no Bloomfield, Firth, Halliday, Crystal, Sanorta, or Chafe, and even the too-ubiquitous Chomsky is missing). Metz sometimes interweaves his two influences, sometimes uses one to interrogate the other, and sometimes effectively. He criticizes, with a very welcome decisiveness, such vacuous categories as syntagma/paradigm and metaphor/metonymy. One senses substantial pressure from less clearly acknowledged influences, notably Morin and Mitry, and, presumably, the "bourgeois" subcultures to which they owe so much; but there's never enough to expand Lacan-and-Jakobson into the basis for an adequate communication-and-semantics theory. Jakobson's assumptions of the dominance of thought by language are completely unconvincing and the metatheoretical reasons are spelled out for him by Piaget in his Introduction to *Main Trends in Interdisciplinary Research,* 1970—also missing from Metz).

Instead of trying to abolish the subject, along the lines inherited by *Screen* from, not, as they think, Marxist materialism, but from the bourgeois rationalist Lévi-Strauss, Metz fully understands Morin's theory of identification-projection, a fully dialectic hypothesis which Morin surely derived from American projective psychology, woven around the Rorschach Test. Its implications are far-reaching. Far from being a text's obedient dupe, the spectator's preconscious (not merely his Unconscious) preaffects what he then thinks he reads (or sees) in it. I would add that what psychologists call "projection," in this sense, differs from "projection" in the commonest Freudian sense, and corresponds to what showbiz theory schematized around 1930 as "identification." Such discrepancies between converging disciplines help to explain the fascination of linguistics!

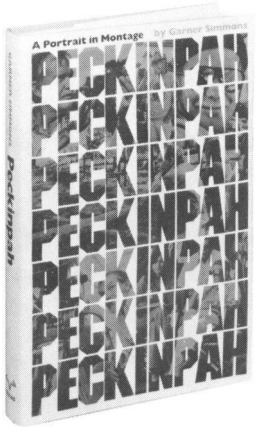
The cultural context of Metz's work places the English reviewer in a quandary. Given its subcultural matrix, Metz's book has enormous virtues, and one can't but admire the wiliness, even in its woolliness, of his humanism, his humanity. It's very useful reading indeed for anyone who's had the bad luck to be taught film theory through structuralism's imbrication of detours-within-detours (anthropology, phonology, Althusser's struggle to cure himself of Stalinism, etc.). But those whose film theory draws on mainstream aesthetics, and Anglo-American culture, don't need its virtues, while others risk being drawn by them into the very theoretical traps from which Metz can't

quite complete his escape. For he's still on his long march towards paradigms which are so familiar here that they're almost part of "common sense."

Three examples. (1) Metz argues that we experience film neither as reality nor as dream, but as something intermediate, rather like daydream. But the very formulation is a truism of the forties (*viz.* Powdermaker's title *Hollywood the Dream Factory,* where "dream" means "daydream"). Second, "daydream" itself is a perilous metaphor, not only because daydreams are auto-produced and films are social products, but above all because most movies are vastly more dramatic and reality-oriented than most daydreams.

(2) Metz's account of spectator-experience stresses voyeurism, fetishism, etc. This accent on perverse pleasure revives an outgrown Freudian reductionism. But it flows from Lacan's linguistics. For, if verbal structures dominate the construction of the Symbolic order, then pictorial structures either don't exist or represent the Imaginary. And indeed the neo-Lacanian theory of Laura Mulvey and *Screen* goes to war against the pleasure principle and constantly compares the spectator's mental operations to pathological conditions. Lacan's theoretical scoptophobia is fatal to the study of film, since its logical correlative is self-castration by superego forces. To escape Lacan's scenic fetishism Metz needs that grasp of the active structures of visual perception which 25 years ago Anglo-American aesthetics laid out for him, just as, in textual psychodynamics, it has Simon Lesser, Norman Holland, etc.

(3) Metz calls on Melanie Klein to explain film theorists' ambivalence towards their subject. Here, at last, is a resort to Anglo-American theory, which, as so often, carries a German name—for the massive strength of that theory derives from the fact that it isn't only Anglo-American; it's profoundly European and has at its disposal a Germanic rigor, albeit that of the liberal diaspora after 1933. Moreover, theory-as-psychodrama is a very familiar idea, at least in English culture, even if it's still very daring in French (one need only think back to J. O. Wisdom's study of the unconscious origins of Berkeley's philosophy around 1950). Furthermore, Metz, presumably



James Caan:
"What do I think of Peckinpah? If we get two more signatures, I'm going to have him put away. Wanna sign?"

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because he sees Kleinian theory only through Lacanian spectacles (or should we say reading-glasses?), doesn't spot the problems which Kleinian theory really does pose for Lacan's phallocentric emphases concerning desire and meaning. This mixture of over-precision and vagueness is pandemic in structuralist theory. And the result here is that Metz is regularly contorted, vague or tentative where Anglophone culture is direct, flexible and specific.

Metz's phenomenological sensitivity constantly kicks against his theoretical pricks, and generates many excellent short passages: too many to count. But the lack of alternative paradigms forces him into strange devices, such as lengthy interpretations of his own dreams. The procedure is obviously slippery, since he can't remember what his dreams *didn't* say, and who on earth is in a position to correct his own ideas about his own dreams? Why go to such lengths to avoid discussing publicly available texts?

Metz's expositions of the shifting semantics of words like "Bordeaux" and "tête" may be useful to those who have attempted the impossible task of separating synchronic and diachronic linguistics. But for the rest of us they labor the obvious: we've all seen the word "black" change meaning within a few years, as a result of social change forcing a linguistic change which is still only "patchworked" and unstable. Similarly, Metz's paradoxes of "present yet absent" make very heavy weather of how photographs merely *evoke* their subject; he's still in the grip of Bazin-Barthes theory whereby a photograph is a sort of presence as well as just a picture.

Lost amongst all these tangles, the analyses of specific films, or of film form, are rare, brief and have no need of his theory. We're assured that the shrieking cockatoo in *Citizen Kane* is a phallic symbol (yawn. And I thought that it was a flying pussy). Metz's sense of how "loose" its other meanings are is quite first-rate. But who would want to disagree with them, except those for whom the "real" meaning of everything is a genital one?

By and large, it's only too clear that the semiotic emphasis on the form of the signifier has crippled its semantics (whereas logical-materialist empiricism starts from the semantic without avoiding the extent to which the

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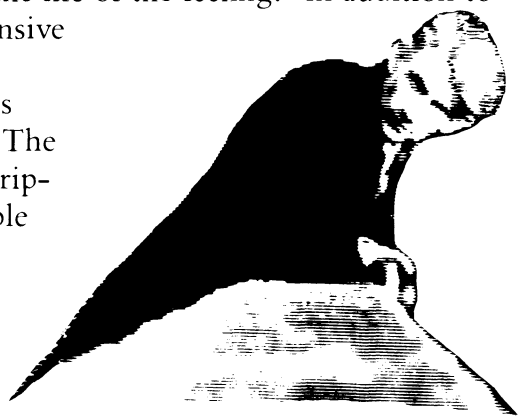

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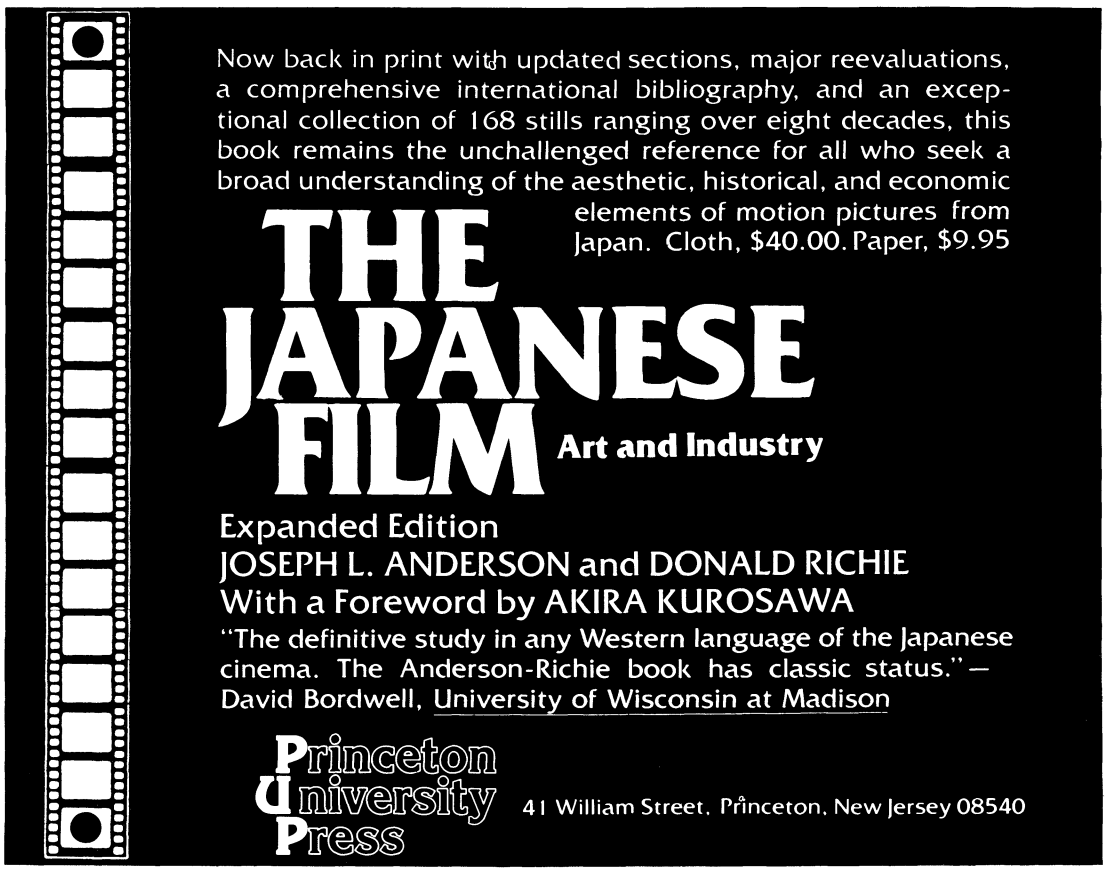
form of the signifier is a material reality like anything else).

While Metz can only hope to convince those already convinced by Lacan, his arguments are unusually well conducted, within those terms and as far as their topics can take them. The positions which he selects are all *allowable;* the fact remains that in this vast and intricate field so many alternatives are at least as allowable that that's a somewhat negative qualification. When one considers all the possible *combinations* of parts of theoretical positions, allowability becomes still less impressive, and once again we're in that strange methodological area best explored by Popper, Feyerabend and Lakatos.

It's symptomatic that Metz's worked examples are illustrations, not tests, of his positions. To watch him unpick his matrix paradigms, stitch by slow stitch, exerts a patience-snapping fascination. Connoisseurs of theory for its own sake, like chess-games, Rubik cubes, or theological disputations, will find much to delight them in this curate's egg. It's patently inadequate to film, because both Jakobsonian formalism and Lacanalysis are inadequate to their own fields, let alone a semantics of the cinema. Nonetheless, like Metz's first three books, it deserves a respectful, and friendly, salute as it lumbers off to wherever white elephant theories go to fade away.

Worthy of prolonged study, though, is Metz's rhetorical style, which is quite fascinating, and intermittently shows the class of senior wranglers like Lévi-Strauss and Barthes. I love the way a wealth of digressions—erudite, intricate, oblique, far-fetched—distract not only the reader, but also the writer, from the matter in hand, whenever the going becomes tricky. Similarly, long strings of concessive clauses acknowledge objections and counter-possibilities while denying them a firm footing in syntax and therefore in thought. All this offers very rich material for deconstruction. Best of all, Metz is quite genuinely *gemütlich,* as when he writes: "At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress," which is a very beautiful sentence as well as a too-terse subversion of what Lacan takes



from Sartre about the sadism of the look. (The translations, by the way, are generally excellent, for the translators know their film culture.) Metz follows this finely poetic sentence with a paragraph which needs only the substitution of "associations" for "codes" to call forth the richness of mainstream psychology, aesthetics and semantics. At this rate, it won't be long before Paris begins to realize what Anglo-American culture has been about for fifty years.

Meanwhile, one fears that this text will be promoted repressively, as part of a *Kulturkampf* against (a) the national culture, (b) Western culture, (c) the pleasure principle, (d) showbiz as entertainment, and (e) certain powerful virtues in "bourgeois" culture and "bourgeois" science. In the short run, and to that extent, this "post-structuralist" subculture looks like being even more debilitating, albeit in opposite ways, than the old regime's benign neglect. —RAYMOND DURGNAT

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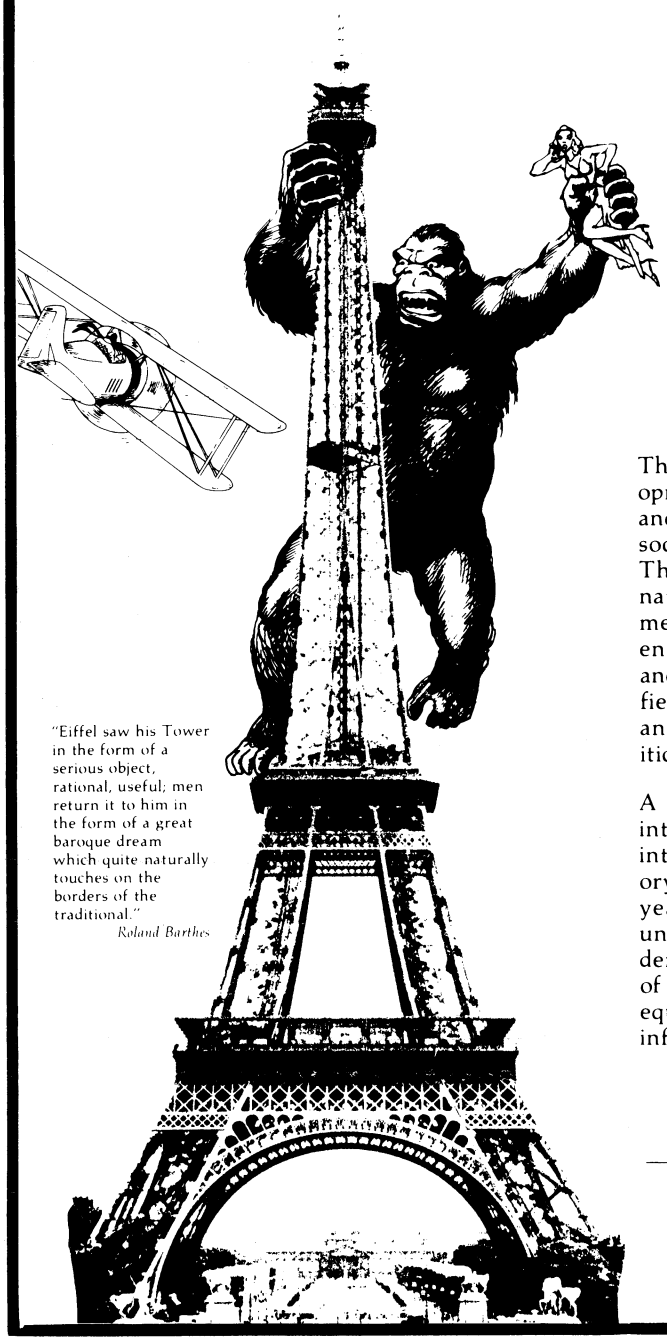

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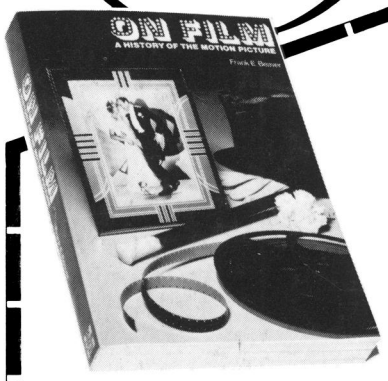

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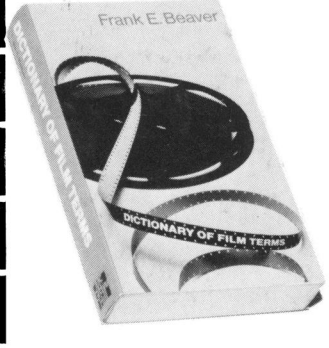

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